July 2003

Dear Nebraska Educators, Students and Families, Community Members, and others interested in PreK-16 Literacy Education:

We are pleased to present you with *Creating Learners: A Shared Responsibility*, a product of the PreK-16 Language Arts/English Task Force. This document was developed through the focused interactions of 59 educators from across Nebraska representing all educational levels from early childhood to postsecondary.

The purpose of Nebraska's PreK-16 Initiative is to promote a seamless educational path for Nebraska students. Like the Mathematics Articulation document, which was released in 2002, this Language Arts/English document contributes to this effort by providing a shared vision of literacy education for Nebraska students. The document articulates learning expectations for students at every educational level in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It also describes effective classroom practices in Language Arts/English, and provides written descriptions of actual classroom practices. (The web version of this document will also include video clips of classroom interactions; see <http://p-16nebraska.nebraska.edu>.) Finally, *Creating Learners* includes brief descriptions of resources for literacy teaching and learning across the educational levels.

In short, this document is a tool to promote *conversations* – among educators in professional development settings and among a wide array of stakeholders in any setting in which students' development as language users is valued. The task force participants have expressed the wish that this will be a "living document" – that educators and others will *use* it to spur reflection and action. We echo that sentiment.

We would like to thank the PreK-16 English/Language Arts Task Force members, who worked tirelessly to come to mutual understandings of Nebraska English/Language Arts education. We would also like to acknowledge the leadership contributions of the co-chairs of this committee: Chris Gallagher, Associate Professor of English, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Suzanne Ratzlaff, Heartland Community Schools; and Kim Larson, Reading/Writing Director, Nebraska Department of Education. On the following page you will find a list of the members of the Nebraska PreK-16 Steering Committee under whose auspices this work was accomplished. We hope you will find *Creating Learners: A Shared Responsibility* helpful as a resource for learning about and participating in English/Language Arts education in Nebraska.

Sincerely,

Doug Christensen
Nebraska Commissioner of Education

L. Dennis Smith
President, University of Nebraska

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Nebraska

Creating Learners: A Shared Responsibility

An Articulation Project of the

Nebraska PreK-16 Initiative

2003

Nebraska PreKindergarten through Postsecondary Initiative (PreK-16): Language Arts/English Articulation Document

Visit our website at
http://p-16nebraska.nebraska.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Creating Learners: A Shared Responsibility

What is *Creating Learners*?
This document is, above all, **a celebration** of teachers' and students' creativity and commitment to learning. At a time when education is increasingly controlled by people remote from the scene of instruction, when complex human processes (such as writing and learning) are mechanized, and when keeping score seems more important than keeping company, we hope to give voice to the complex and ennobling work of teaching and learning. This document honors a conviction that language arts teachers hold dear: that teachers and students are creative and critical meaning-makers.

This document is also a **collective articulation**. "Articulation" has two relevant meanings. First, to articulate is to *give voice*. In this document, English teachers from across grade levels – from Pre-Kindergarten through college – and from across the different kinds of educational institutions in our state give voice to what we believe about and expect from students – and ourselves! Second, "articulate" also means to *identify interrelations* (as when we "articulate" coordinates on a map). In these pages, acting as mutually responsible partners, we identify both the continuities and discontinuities in literacy learning across grade levels. Even as we articulate our differences, we voice a shared vision of meaningful literacy education for all Nebraska students.

Perhaps most importantly, *Creating Learners* is an **invitation to conversation**. We want this to be a *living* document. In other words, we want it to spur discussion among *all* sponsors of student learning – including teachers, administrators, parents, community members, policymakers, politicians…and of course students themselves. We have designed this document to raise questions, as well as provide answers. Some of the larger questions we pose are these:

- What does it mean to be a well-educated Nebraskan?
- What is the place of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening) in a meaningful education?
- What kind of readers, writers, speakers, and listeners do we hope to help students become?
- What are the purposes of education, and specifically language learning, in today's world?
- What can we all do to encourage students' development as language learners?
- What can we all do to help students negotiate key educational transitions (such as the move from high school to college)?
- What can we all do to help students lay a solid foundation for lifelong literacy learning?

Why is *Creating Learners* important?

This document is the first of its kind in Nebraska. Never before has such a broadly representative professional body been assembled to articulate a shared vision of language arts across grade levels in our state. This historic occasion is particularly important now, as the state of Nebraska fights a courageous battle to protect local decision-making and teacher professionalism in the midst of top-down, standardized reform initiatives. We see our work as part of a larger effort to turn educational reform "inside-out" by giving teachers a voice and making classrooms the primary focus and engine of change. In short, this is a *pedagogical*, not an administrative project. Our aim has been to identify broad learning goals, which are not amenable to simple measurement, but which can guide teachers and others as they promote students' literacy learning.

Our project is also part of a *national* movement to create "systems-based" reform. We are participating in a shift toward a new way of thinking about education: one that brings teachers out of our individual classrooms and schools

to learn from one another. This helps us understand where our students are coming from, and where they are going. It helps us become more reflective, informed practitioners.

But in the final analysis, this document is important only to the extent that it promotes improved teaching and learning in our state. It will be important if people *make* it important by using it.

How can I use *Creating Learners*?

- *To inform individual classroom practice.* This document provides guidance and clarity of purpose for teachers as they navigate through the many layers of responsibilities that have accrued to them in recent years. Far from another administrative checklist, this document should be used as a professional development tool that makes teachers' lives *easier*, not harder. Moreover, as an invitation into conversation, it both combats isolation and values autonomy.

- *To conduct staff development.* This document may be used with language arts teachers or teachers across the curriculum as a resource and workshop discussion piece. It may also be used to inform curricular development.

- *To promote community engagement.* Because it raises important questions about why and how we teach literacy, this document may be used to encourage dialogue among teachers, administrators, and various educational stakeholders.

A Final Word

We wish to thank the insightful and enthusiastic professionals from around the state who gave so much of their time and genius to the Task Force. We are privileged to work in a state with such wonderful teachers and colleagues. We wish our own children could be in each of your classrooms!

We also wish to thank the leaders of Nebraska's PreK-16 Initiative, including the members of the steering and work committees. Special thanks go to Doug Christensen, Polly Feis, Lee Jones, Jay Noren, Sharon Katt, Donlynn Rice, and Dennis Smith for their unwavering support and invitation to make this project our own.

Thanks, too, to Deb Romanek and Gordon Woodward, our trailblazing mathematics colleagues.

Finally, we are grateful to these people who have assisted us with grace, wit, and good sense: Rachael Black, John Clark, Mardi North, Karen Kloch, and Caroline O'Reilly.

We dedicate this document to our students, always our inspiration.

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Nebraska Pre-Kindergarten Through Postsecondary (PreK-16)
Language Arts/English Articulation Document
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Early Childhood

EARLY CHILDHOOD

INTRODUCTION

The Early Childhood section of the PreK-16 Language Arts/English Task Force included teachers, administrators, and staff developers. We assembled to create a document that would highlight best practices within the language arts area of the early childhood setting.

This piece was designed as an outline of what best practices can look like in the early childhood classroom with reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Young children learn best through experience, and this document can serve as a guide in helping you to create a setting in which all children can participate in the learning process.

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Language Arts/English Learning Expectations

EARLY CHILDHOOD

1. As learners, children will
   a. enjoy the reading and writing process
   b. remain curious about the world around them and become aware of the print around them
   c. become confident in their ability to learn
   d. participate actively in a print and conversation-rich learning environment
   e. experience age-appropriate development of oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabetic knowledge
   f. engage in multiple daily opportunities to interact as listeners, speakers, readers, and writers
   g. explore diversity (including feelings and empathy toward others) throughout their daily lives
2. As listeners, children will experience
   a. activities connecting meaning with language through conversations, stories, and text read aloud
   b. oral readings of books and stories
   c. a variety of interactive rhymes, songs, fingerplays, rhyming games, poetry, and alliterative activities
   d. the rhythm of letter and word sounds through movement
   e. listening for meaning and understanding in a variety of situations
3. As speakers, children will experience
   a. opportunities for the development of speech and articulation of sounds, words, and phrases
   b. engagement with rich and frequent verbal interactions with adults and peers
   c. language for a variety of purposes; i.e., role playing, rhyming, using props, describing feelings, telling jokes, conversing, etc.
   d. opportunities to question so as to clarify meaning
   e. sharing thoughts and ideas through verbal interaction
4. As readers, students will experience
   a. connecting personal experiences with stories and/or books
   b. participation in a variety of reading activities throughout the day
   c. the functional use of a variety of printed materials
   d. enjoyment and appreciation of books, stories, and other printed materials
   e. self-selection and choice in books and print materials
5. As writers, children will experience
   a. exploration of a variety of writing tools and materials

b. opportunities to express their thoughts and ideas through the developmental stages of scribbles to conventional print

c. the connection between written language and oral language

d. many purposes for writing: to send a message, to share a story, to remember, to inform, etc.

6. Teachers/caregivers and families will provide

a. appropriate adult modeling of language, communication, reading, and writing

b. clear expectations for learning and regular authentic assessment

c. literacy-rich environments

d. regular communication between teachers/caregivers and home/family members

e. the opportunity to share and grow through relating personal experiences

f. developmentally appropriate practices and materials for learning

g. active participation in home/program/school environment

h. experiences and opportunities to promote active learning through small group and large group activities

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY

Arwood, Ellyn. ***Apricot I*** **(Portland, OR: APRICOT, Inc,. 1985),** ***Reading: It's So Easy To See (R.I.S.E.S.) Picture Language, Level I: Developing the Process*** **(Portland, OR: APRICOT, Inc., 1994),** ***A Guide to Cartooning and Flowcharting: See the Ideas*** **(Portland, OR: APRICOT, Inc., 1999), and** ***Balanced Literacy: Phonics, Viconics, Kitnesics*** **(Portland, OR: APRICOT, Inc., 2002)** are all helpful tools for understanding the language processes in young children and how to help them develop early literacy skills based upon their individual learning system.

Campbell, Robin. ***Facilitating Preschool Literacy*** **(International Reading Association 1998).** This book addresses three important themes in the literacy learning of young children: 1) Children are active constructors of their own learning, 2) Families provide invaluable support in the early literacy learning of children, and 3) Preschool settings should reflect the literacy learning that occurs in many homes and provide opportunities for children to further develop their literacy. Teacher dialogue and children's examples are included.

Dickinson, David. ***Beginning Literacy with Language: Young children Learning at Home and School. (*** **Paul Brooks Publishing Co., 2001).** This book explores both the home and school environments of young children to see how language and literacy are supported through the child's significant caregivers. A look at the relationship between the early environment of young children and the later correlation to reading success is documented with a group of young children from diverse backgrounds, which showed a strong relationship between early interactions with caregivers and the children's kindergarten language and literacy skills.

Handy, Shirley. ***The Singing-Reading Connection*** **(1989, revised 1996) and** ***M.O.R.E. of the Singing-Reading Connection (Musically Oriented Relevant Experiences)*** **(1994), (Hilmer, CA: National Educational Network).** These workshops and materials (CDs with songcards) are resources to aid in making the connection between music and the language arts for young children.

Hodgdon, Linda A. ***Visual Strategies for Improving Communication, Volume 1: Practical Supports for School and Home*** **(Troy, MI: QuirkRoberts Publishing, 1995, 1996).** Provides ideas for giving children the visual support they need for communication development in the classroom.

Hohmann, Mary. ***Fee, Fie, Phonemic Awareness*** **(High Scope Press, 2002).** This book contains 130 pre-reading activities that can be used with young children to help develop letter-sound awareness. Practical activities are included to help children recognize letters, identify sounds, and become more aware of rhyme and alliteration. An activity log and literacy development assessment are also included.

The National Research Council. ***Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*** **(National Academy Press, 1999).** This book identifies the three core elements that all children need to be successful readers. Children who learn to read successfully are able to identify printed words, use previous knowledge to establish meaning, and read with fluency. These skills start to develop early in life, building on the Preschool foundation. Practical strategies and actual examples help show the theory into practice.

Nebraska Department of Education Early Childhood Website.
(< http://www.nde.state.ne.us/ECH/ECH.html>.) The Early Childhood website through the Nebraska Department of Education offers information about resources, conferences, statewide initiatives, and professional organizations.

Neuman, Susan B., Carol Copple, and Sue Bredekamp. ***Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*** **(NAEYC 2000).** This book describes the joint position statement between the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children on developmentally appropriate ways of teaching children to read and write. Included are photographs, concrete guidelines, and classroom ideas that can be implemented by early childhood educators.

Notari-Syverson, Angela, Rollanda O'Connor, and Patricia Vadasy. ***Ladders To Literacy: A Preschool Activity Book*** **(Paul Brookes Publishing Co. 1998).** This is a resource for early childhood educators that includes games, storytelling and other classroom play ideas to enhance print and book awareness, metalinguistic awareness and oral language skills. The activities included in this book help to support the individual child and where they are on their continuum of language and literacy learning, while also giving ideas for scaffolding them on to the next level.

Opitz, Michael. ***Rhymes & Reasons: Literature and Language Play*** **(Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH, 2000).** This book contains the theoretical background on how phonological awareness develops in young children, along with an annotated list of current children's literature that can be used within the curriculum to teach phonological skills. Opitz reviews the four basic theories of how phonological awareness develops in young children, and how you can teach it through literature and language play.

Owocki, Gretchen. ***Literacy Through Play*** **(Heinemann Portsmouth, NH, 1999).** A resource for early childhood professionals that includes the theoretical rationale for the importance of play in literacy development, along with an outline of what teachers can do to set up a developmentally appropriate environment for young children. Tips for designing literacy-related play centers along with actual examples are also included.

Owocki, Gretchen. ***Make Way for Literacy! Teaching the Way Young Children Learn*** **(Heinemann, Portsmouth NH, 2001).** This book highlights the continuum of literacy and how it develops, beginning with a child's home and neighborhood and then expands to the preschool and primary grades. Owocki looks at the foundational features of a young child's literacy development-individual traits, family activities and literacy practices, and how those influence the child's later learning experiences.

Robb, Laura. ***Literacy Links: Practical Strategies to Develop the Emergent Literacy At-Risk Children Need*** **(Heinemann, Portsmouth NH, 2003).** This book offers strategies to help literacy-deprived young learners gain in their foundational knowledge in early literacy, so they continue to make gains throughout their kindergarten and primary years. This resource provides useful activities to help narrow the gap between those children who have had previous literacy experiences before starting school, and those who have not.

Schickedanz, Judith. ***Much More Than The ABC's: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing*** **(NAEYC 1999).** A useful tool for looking at the environments of young children before they enter the educational system. Literacy-related learning begins long before children enter school. Parents, caregivers, and early childhood professionals all play important roles in the young child's understanding of literacy, and this book looks at the conditions that can enhance the emergent literacy learning of young children.

Schiller, Pam. ***Creating Readers*** **(Gryphon House, Beltsville, MD, 2000).** This is a comprehensive resource that gives over 1000 activities, games, and finger plays, songs, poems, tongue twisters and stories which will help build an early literacy foundation for young children. The book is organized alphabetically so it is easy to use with themes. Patterns are also included.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SCENARIO

CONNECTED LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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The following is a preschool scenario that can be linked to several of the Early Childhood Expectations for all areas of language arts – speaking, reading, writing, and listening.

In my preschool special education classroom, which includes both verified students and peer models, all content is connected and reflects the children's current knowledge and experiences. Each unit extends from the overall yearly theme and each new unit builds on the previous one.

To introduce each unit, which lasts one to two months, I start with an "I story," where I tell and draw out a cartoon story picture about an experience that I have had. I then have the children share their experiences about the same topic (i.e. visit to the doctor's office, trip to the grocery store, getting the mail at the post office, etc.).

We then plan together what a dramatic play centered around this topic would look like in our classroom and together build the center, often making our own signs, labels, etc. I take digital pictures and also draw event-based pictures of the children as they set up and play in the dramatic play center (grocery store, doctor's office, post office, restaurant, etc.). I then have individual or small groups of children dictate stories to go along with these pictures. At recall time, the children also draw their own pictures and dictate a story about their worktime activities. Some of the children are also able to write some of their own words from a visual model shown to them by one of the adults in the classroom.

After about two weeks of role-play in the center, we often take a field trip to the "real" place in the community. We take more digital pictures and draw and write more recall stories about our experiences. We are then ready to put our stories into a classroom book that can be placed in the book center along with other books relating to the unit.

We also draw and dictate/write stories related to the topic using Dr. Ellyn Arwood's *APRICOT I* (Portland, OR: APRICOT, Inc., 1985) pictures. These pictures show children and adults engaged in events that can be talked about as a large group, in small groups, or individually, and they help the children make more language relationships or connections.

Part of each day's schedule is a reading time, where readers from the fourth grade rooms come into our preschool room to read to the children. This is an exciting time for the preschoolers because they love to sit on the laps of the one or two readers who come into the room at a time. The preschool children listen to and interact about the books with their fourth grade friends.

Elementary

ELEMENTARY

INTRODUCTION

The Elementary section of the Nebraska PreK-16 Language Arts Task Force consisted of elementary classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers , a speech/language pathologist, professional development consultants, and a guidance counselor. We created a document of expectations for elementary students that acknowledges the diversity in how individual students process language and in turn how they learn. The document was grounded in our experience in working with elementary students and in our expertise as educators.

The Elementary document addresses the learning needs of students from grades one through five who exhibit a wide range of language/learning developmental levels. These elementary students do, however, have some characteristics in common. Piaget's general theory of intellectual growth recognizes that elementary age students think very differently and less flexibly than adults, but as they have experiences these students develop the capacity to reason and overcome illusions by discovering how things really are. Children from about age two to seven years old can only consider things from their own point of view, and they imagine that everyone shares their view because it is the only one. From the age of about seven to eleven years old, children begin to develop an ability to think logically and to change their views as long as they can experience ideas through sight and touch.

As elementary educators, our responsibility to these learners is to provide them with an authentic, meaningful, language rich environment of stories and events related to who they are and where they are. Then opportunities are provided that enable the learners to read, write, draw, talk about and move through that environment and in this way actively construct reality out of their experiences. An example could be the event of making soup before reading the story *Stone Soup*. Through students' actions, observations and interactions, they learn such things as how heated water softens some things like vegetables and hardens others like eggs and gives them background information for reading and comprehending the story. The students then read, write, talk and/or draw about this event. Whatever the age or developmental level of elementary students, brain research indicates that with new information these learners need preparatory sets that connect each student to the group. These preparatory sets give them a purpose for learning, multiple representations of the information, clear expectations for academic and social behavior, a safe, comfortable place to try new things and to make mistakes and many opportunities to be successful.

The outcomes of these experiences form the basis of the following list of expectations for elementary students. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but suggests types of language arts competencies students need to have prior to entering middle school. These provide a firm foundation for students' development throughout their lives. In contrast to the Nebraska State Standards, the Elementary document addresses language arts not only academically but also holistically.

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Language Arts/English Learning Expectations

ELEMENTARY

1. As learners, students will
   a. learn about the world by reading, writing, speaking, and listening
   b. understand that reading, writing, and language are tools used for communication (receptive and expressive)
   c. communicate effectively through writing, speaking, and listening
   d. understand that there are different ways of learning and communicating
   e. begin to take responsibility for their own learning and communicating by discovering how their individual systems function and what they need from their educational environment
   f. discover, celebrate, and utilize individual learning strengths
   g. participate actively in the classroom environment as a community of learners who receive and share information for a stated purpose
   h. use reading, writing, speaking, and listening seamlessly throughout the day and across the curriculum
   i. demonstrate an understanding of the steps of inquiry research
   j. think critically to process language
   k. adapt strategies for processing (before, during, and after) a reading, writing, speaking, and listening task
2. As readers, students will
   a. view themselves as readers
   b. develop a love of reading
   c. feel confident in their ability to read for meaning and to understand the purpose for reading
   d. relate stories and informational texts to personal experiences and background knowledge in order to enhance comprehension
   e. understand and utilize effective comprehension strategies for multiple text structures
   f. use known letters/sounds, words, word parts, context, and other strategies to figure out unknown words in text
   g. select and read a wide variety of texts (fiction and nonfiction) depending on purpose (including printed texts, electronically transmitted texts, and visual/pictorial representations)
   h. interpret and appreciate authors' diverse points of view
3. As writers, students will
   a. view themselves as writers
   b. learn how to express themselves in a genuine way to communicate information, thoughts, and feelings
   c. write and draw to make sense of what they hear, see, do, think, and know

d. know and understand the elements and modes of writing

e. understand the different forms of writing and adjust writing to different purposes, audiences, and genres

f. understand stages and uses of writing processes to create, revise, edit, and publish written work

g. identify strengths and weaknesses in a variety of writing (including personal writing)

4. As speakers, students will

a. view themselves as speakers

b. speak so others can understand by organizing thoughts and fine-tuning language choices to fit the context and audience

c. talk with others about different ways we learn and gain meaning from print

d. communicate with each other about their reading, writing, and drawing and give feedback to others that is relevant and useful

e. speak in front of a group to communicate information and ideas and to perform literary works (poetry, reader's theater, plays)

f. engage in rich and frequent verbal interactions/conversations with responsive adults and peers

5. As listeners, students will

a. view themselves as listeners

b. use prior knowledge and background experiences to be able to listen

c. listen attentively, appreciatively, and critically depending upon format

d. retain, use, and apply information incorporating prior knowledge and experiences

e. follow oral directions using multiple strategies

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING ELEMENTARY LITERACY

Armbruster, Bonnie, Fran Leyhr, and Jean Osborn. *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. Ed. C Ralph Adler. Partnership for Reading. (Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy at ED Pubs, 2001.) Distributed by the United States Department of Education, this document summarizes the findings of the National Reading Panel report and provides analysis and discussion in five areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The document defines these skills, reviews related research, suggests implications for classroom instruction, describes strategies for teaching reading skills, and addresses frequently raised questions.

Arwood, Ellyn and Judy McInRoy. *R.I.S.E.S. - Reading It's So Easy To See.* (Portland: Apricot Inc., 1994.) R.I.S.E.S. was developed based on what is known about the interaction between child development and learning. Children and adults who use pictures in their minds (visual language system) to think have a different way of understanding what they see. When looking at print, visual language thinkers translate what is seen on the page from mental pictures to auditory words. It is easier and faster for them to just see words as pictures without being required to translate.

Arwood, Ellyn and Mabel Brown. *Balanced Literacy: Phonics, Viconics, Kinesics.* (Portland: Apricot Inc., 2002.) Today's focus on literacy suggests that educators must be equipped with a variety of methods to meet the diversity of learners in today's society. Legislation has narrowed the idea of literacy by emphasizing a single auditory approach. There are other ways to decode English besides using sounds and letters. This book describes those ways.

Elkind, David. *Children and Adolescents: Interpretive Essays on Jean Piaget*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.) David Elkind presents fifteen essays in which he demonstrates how Piagetian theory can be used to derive practical implications for education and clinical diagnosis. He presents Piaget's basic concepts - assimilation, accommodation, equilibrium, cognitive structures, mental operations and schema-outlining the Piagetian stages of intelligence development.

Fountas, Irene and Gay Su Pinnell. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for all Children*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.) This book explains best practice for teaching young children to read (kindergarten through grade three). It addresses the decisions that teachers must make regarding all aspects of guided reading: observing reading behavior, gathering evidence of mental processing, grouping and regrouping children, selecting books, introducing stories, supporting reading, and managing learning activities.

International Reading Association. (Newark, DE. <http://www.reading.org>.)
The International Reading Association is a professional membership organization dedicated to promoting high levels of literacy for all by improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit. Members include classroom teachers, reading specialists, consultants, administrators, supervisors, university faculty, researchers, psychologists, librarians, media specialists, and parents. Visit this website for up-to-date information about services and publications.

International Reading Association. *Making a Difference Means Making It Different: Honoring Children's Rights to Excellent Reading Instruction.* (< http://www.reading.org/positions/MADMMID.html>, 15 May 2003.) A Position Statement of the International Reading Association. Schools in the United States face enormous challenges in teaching children to read and write. Meeting these challenges in the 21st century will require a fundamental change in how policy makers, parents, and school professionals look at improving schools. The International Reading Association declares that it is time to build reading programs on a set of comprehensive principles that honor children's rights to excellent reading instruction.

Nebraska Department of Education Reading/Writing Website. (< http://www.nde.state.ne.us/read>.) The Reading/Writing website through the Nebraska Department of Education offers information about resources, conferences, statewide initiatives, and professional organizations. Sign up to receive information related to literacy education via this webpage.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

BECOMING LITERATE THROUGH HONORING STRENGTHS

Jan Friesen, Contributor
Language/Resource Teacher
Educational Service Unit 6
Heartland Community Schools
Henderson Nebraska

In order to help students develop confidence and a love of reading we need to provide opportunities for students to learn through their individual strengths. Many students need to learn reading and writing skills within the context of a story or learning event as traditional learning tends to be in pieces, and many students never see the real purpose and connection of their schoolwork to the real world. When the classroom units are integrated across the curriculum these students have an opportunity to learn to read, as the familiar topic stays consistent throughout the day. This continuity of topic allows the student to focus on the process of reading.

First grade children excitedly look into a box. In the box is a baby pig! The pig squeals and the children laugh. The farmer describes how he takes care of the wiggly pig as the students ask questions. They have been reading and writing a story about a little pig that gets out of the pigpen. Through this story they are learning sight words, phonics, compound words, punctuation, capitalization, and how to write a complete thought. They are learning in the context of a story, which is integrated with their science and social studies unit. As the students experience pigs and farms, meaning and clarity in their writing increases. Their enthusiasm and the overlapped information learned through other literature helps them to develop their own voice when writing. Reading strategies emerge as they read for meaning. Teachers use these opportunities to incorporate the teaching of skills. The needs of the whole child are met and optimum learning occurs.

Sometimes special education students struggle to connect to the classroom where academic learning remains a mystery. These children need more opportunities to talk, draw and act out the story before learning to write and read can become meaningful. One year three first grade children struggled and their needs were addressed with additional time in a small group. The literacy process began as they interacted daily, in a small group, about the little pig that got out of the pigpen. First they needed the "big picture" of the story or an overview of the story in addition to the visual information that layers information about the farm and the little pig. Then reading and writing began by breaking the story down into individual events that allowed for daily representation through drawing and writing about the event that they had read. To connect previous learning to new information, each day they read the story from the day before, then read the new information followed by writing and illustrating the new idea. When the story was finished the next book was about the same family with a new event on their farm allowing the students to remain immersed in the topic while their new learning focused on the reading process.

By the end of October parents were reporting that these children wanted to read all of the time. One mother told her child that she could not follow her mom into the bathroom to read. Another mother said that her son was reading to her all of the time, and she was exhausted trying to keep up with her child's enthusiasm for reading. By December the students were doing class work without the extra small group help. At the end of third grade one student had moved, one student was reading at third-grade, first semester level, and the third student was reading significantly above grade level. These students had not only developed a love of reading but had developed the skills to read and write. They had become literate through a process that honored their strengths.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

ENJOY POETRY

Nancy Armstrong, Contributor
Fourth Grade Teacher
Ogallala Public Schools
Ogallala, Nebraska.

I decided to update my teaching of poetry focusing on the use of technology and with emphasis on the Nebraska Reading and Writing Standards (NE Standards). I discovered numerous websites using <www.dogpile.com> and typing in "poetry" and "poetry for elementary students"; I found thousands of sites but settled on a few websites that were educationally, developmentally appropriate, and downloaded quickly. After my research, I merged some of my former practices of teaching poetry with my new findings and I created the following activities.

Activity 1: Students experience different types of poetry by listening to several styles of poems from a variety of authors.

Strategies: Students listen to poetry read aloud and from cassette tapes of poems, also view videocassettes about poets. This activity may also encompass multicultural education. Some poems to use to weave poetry across the curriculum are:

- *Math*: "Dad Says I'm Smart" by Shel Silverstein
- *Science*: Joyful Noise by Sid Fleischman
- *Science*: "Meet The Clouds" by Christine Locke
- *Social Skills*: "Me I Am!" by Jack Prelutsky
- *Physical Education*: Casey at Bat by Ernest Thayer
- *Video*: Meet Jack Prelutsky (22 minutes)

4.4.1 Gain information or complete tasks by listening. (NE Standard)

Activity 2: Students read poetry published on the Internet.

Strategies: Students use a "bookmarked" list to search for poetry. Students read a variety of poetry.

Websites:

- <www.poetry4kids.com>
- <http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/silverstein.htm>
- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/index.htm>

4.1.4 Locate, access, and evaluate resources to identify appropriate information. (NE Standard)
2.1.3 Use a variety of media and technology resources for directed and independent learning activities. (Nebraska Student Essential Learnings in Technology)

Activity 3: Students write poems.

Strategies: Students read writing tips from J. Prelutsky and K. Kuskin –available at:

- <http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/index.htm>

4.1.4 Locate, access, and evaluate resources to identify appropriate information. (NE Standards)
4.2.1 Identify, describe, and apply knowledge of correct conventions for correct language. (NE Standards)
2.1.5 Use developmentally appropriate resources to support learning. (NE Student Essential Learnings in Technology)

Students rewrite poems and edit as needed.

Strategies: Students use rhyming dictionaries, thesaurus, and other resources to help them chose the "right" words. Use on-line rhyming dictionary:

- <www.rhymezone.com >

4.1.2 Acquire and use advanced vocabulary. (NE Standard)
4.2.3 Show improved editing, fluency, organization, content with own work. (NE Standard)
2.5.1 Use technology resources to gather, process, and report information. (NE Student Essential Learnings in Technology)

Activity 4: Students illustrate their poems.

Strategies: Students neatly copy or use word processors to put their poems on posters. Students illustrate their poems using art medium of their choice. Students may download pictures to illustrate their poems. Display poems in the school hallway or have them displayed in the Nebraska State Office Building during April. (NDE "Poetry Month Celebration" <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/read>)

Activity 5: Students recite their poems.

Strategies: Students memorize their poems.
Students present poems at local speech contests.

4.3.2 Make oral presentations showing awareness of audience, purpose, and information. (NE Standard)

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

GETTING HOOKED ON BOOKS

Cathy Greenwald, Contributor
Willowdale Elementary School
Millard Public Schools
Omaha, Nebraska

Each day our first graders select their books for **Sustained Silent Reading** (**SSR**) time prior to going to lunch and recess. Students come in from recess ready to settle in with a book or two. One table of students is designated each day to have the oversized pillows and all students scatter about the classroom to read. We build our **SSR** time up from five minutes in August to twenty-five minutes in May.

Student book selections are made from our class library. Our library consists of a wide range of text leveled material and titles grouped by author and genre. Making appropriate book choices is one of the first skills of independence that I teach. Also, I gradually increase the number of bookshelves from which students may select. By October students have freedom to self-select from most any text in the room. Also, there are times that I instruct some children to use **SSR** time to reread their assigned guided reading book.

Immediately following the "quiet" of **SSR** is **Read with a Friend** time. When students know that they have that fifteen minutes to read with each other following **SSR** it makes the "silent" part of **SSR** much easier to endure. As soon as I announce it is **"Read with a Friend"** time there is a buzz throughout the classroom. Some students, especially later in the year when they are reading chapter books, choose to continue to read alone.

As the teacher, I may join in a group or take this opportunity to observe. I am likely to witness students role-playing as the teacher while reading with one another. They also engage in dialogue about book plots, share their excitement for particular authors and genre, and get each other hooked on books!

This independent reading time can be a beneficial part of the school day. However it can also be difficult to manage for quality reading. Several skills of independence are taught in regard to the management of **SSR** and **Read with a Friend.** The teacher needs to be involved and watch the choices children make. I have found that connecting these two reading opportunities makes for a successful and joyful reading experience.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

MEMORIES OF FARMERS' VALLEY CEMETERY

Deb Friesen and Suzanne Ratzlaff, Contributors
Fourth Grade Teachers
Heartland Community Schools
Henderson, Nebraska

"If you don't know where you are, you don't know who you are."
Wendell Berry

Memories of Farmers' Valley is a project encompassing many elements of learning, including research skills, authentic reading and writing activities, plus community involvement. Along with the students becoming actively engaged and self-motivated throughout this project, they were also meeting and exceeding many Nebraska State Standards. An exciting project while assessing state standards! Can you beat that?

When school began, the teachers started by telling stories of Farmers' Valley Cemetery, stories of their own experiences visiting this historical site and of the people buried there. Yet, pieces were deliberately left out. A story was started with the ending unfinished and information unknown. This was to "whet the children's appetites." Then in September, the students experienced their first trip to the cemetery. Stories were told, epitaphs read, and grave rubbings made. Students viewed deteriorated gravestones and discussed ideas for remembering these names and dates. The children also stood by the original resting site of David and Helen Henderson, for whom our town was named. David and his wife were exhumed and moved to a cemetery in York, Nebraska in the 1930's. It was then that the idea to research stories of the cemetery and publish a book began to take shape. Our project was ready for take-off.

During the next two months, brainstorming took place and chart paper began to fill up with ideas for our book. Historical documents gathered from the Hamilton County Historical Society and the York County Historical Association were read by the students. Topics for vignettes were recorded and future interviews were planned. Then on a nice, fall day, our second trip to the cemetery gave the children the opportunity to experience a tour by a local community member and a chance to study more graves markers.

Then in January an interview was set up with a local historian who had grown up on the same section of land as the cemetery. She was invited into our classroom to share her stories and historical materials. Documentation was done through videotaping, photographing, scanning, and note taking. Since fourth graders are just learning the skills for note taking, the teacher wrote and drew the important information on an easel as the students listened and took individual notes. Next, students began writing letters to descendents of people buried at Farmers' Valley, asking for family information, plus photographs and documents, which could be used in the book. Also, through January and February, the students took the research skills they had learned and began their own "Personal History Research." Students researched topics such as a great-great-grandfather, their farmland, a civil war relic, a family home in Germany, or the immigration of the German Mennonites from Russia. Presentation boards were completed and displayed at the Plainsman Museum in Aurora. An open house was held at the museum, and the students stood beside their boards and presented to all the visitors. During this project the students were evaluated using student-friendly assessment research guides on Nebraska Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening State Standards.

March came in like a wind as the students focused back to Farmers' Valley and began to organize the book chapters, brainstorm ideas for stories, and compile all resources. With the help of the county historical associations and courthouses, the children began studying and recording information from historical publications, newspaper articles, family records, photographs, land deeds, marriage licenses, plat maps, etc. They continued making contacts through phone calls, letters, and interviews. Students then began writing their vignettes of the Farmers' Valley area,

including historical facts connected to the cemetery and the people buried there.

Our next cemetery field trip to Farmers' Valley was in late April. The children looked up last-minute information needed and checked writings for accuracy. Also, creative writing, such as original poetry inspired by the cemetery's surroundings, was encouraged. During the next two weeks, students edited and proofed their writings, while being assessed on the Nebraska State Writing Standard related to revision and editing. A decision was made to sell their books for $10.00 apiece, and the proceeds would be donated to the Henderson Heritage and Tourism Committee to help fund the Immigrant House Museum project.

By May, final preparations for the book were completed. All stories were checked, scanned photos and documents were inserted in the document, and a hard copy printed. The children then visited Fort Hartsuff along the Sandhills of Nebraska to study its connection to the cemetery. Marion Littlefield, who is buried at Farmers' Valley, was killed in 1874, during a skirmish with the Sioux. It was this incident that prompted the building of Fort Hartsuff. The students saw the original gun Marion was using the day he was killed. On our return, they toured the Happy Jack Chalk Mines along the Loup River and stopped at "Staples" in Grand Island to deliver the master copy of the book. Also, invitations were sent. An article ran in the newspaper announcing our book signing celebration, which would take place outdoors at the cemetery.

May 21 was a day to remember for all who attended our book-signing event. With sunlight streaming through the tall evergreen trees and a comfortable 66 degrees, Farmers' Valley Cemetery was the perfect setting as Heartland fourth graders signed autographs, gave tours, and read their stories to those visiting the cemetery. Some of the adults even shared new stories with the children about Farmers' Valley and the people buried there. Who knows, maybe there could be a *Memories of Farmers' Valley* second edition in the future.

One of our special visitors that day was the park superintendent of Fort Hartsuff, who made a special trip down from Burwell to attend the book signing. He brought with him the original gun once owned by Marion Littlefield. Having this relic at the cemetery was quite an honor because Mr. Lindsay informed the children that Marion's gun had never been taken out of its display case since it became the property of the fort. With over 80 visitors in attendance, it wasn't long before all of the fourth graders' newly published books, *Memories of Farmers' Valley*, had been sold. Since there was an overwhelming request for more copies, the Heritage and Tourism committee printed another 100 copies and those too are almost gone. These young fourth graders were able to raise over $1,000 towards their town's future museum.

Other than becoming active learners, increasing vocabulary, putting their reading and writing skills to use and meeting state standards, these future leaders have uncovered stories of their town's past and invested in their town's future. They have discovered who they are in relation to their community because they are learning to know where they are.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

SPELLING PARAGRAPHS: A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Marcia Ough, Contributor
Elementary Resource Teacher
Heartland Community School
Henderson, Nebraska

In our third and fourth grade classrooms, teachers have created spelling paragraphs in which the content and meaning relate to their integrated curriculum Students are reading, writing, drawing, and talking about the words and relationships in the paragraph throughout their school day. The paragraphs, which increase in length and difficulty as the year progresses, incorporate content vocabulary and the district's high frequency words. If a list of words is used in spelling along with the paragraph, the list consists of individual students' problem words and challenge words. Students often help choose these words. On test day, the paragraph is dictated slowly to the students as they write or type.

The special education teachers or classroom teachers modify these paragraphs for identified students and individualize them with high frequency words at the students' levels. Related word lists include problem words, word families, or base words plus prefixes or suffixes. The resource teacher might also create worksheets related to the paragraph to replace grade level spelling worksheets.

Following are some benefits of a classroom spelling paragraph.

1. Spelling relates to content writing so that students are practicing words that they write often, rather than unrelated lists of spelling words that they might not ever use in their writing.

2. It provides the overlap of information that comes with integrated subject matter, thereby adding meaning to the content being studied.

3. Words are written in context so spelling is always connected to meaning.

4. For visual and/or motor learners the meaning creates pictures, the meaning plus the flow of writing helps with "motor memory," and it is the natural way that we spell and write which all adds to long term memory of how words are spelled.

5. Students are working on skills other than just spelling such as grammar, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, and comprehension. (The spelling grade is limited to the number of words spelled correctly in the paragraph.)

6. It can be easily modified or adapted to meet individual needs of students. No student in the classroom looks "different" because everyone is working on a paragraph and related list of words.

7. It is motivating to students because the words and content are meaningful, and each student is working at his/her correct level of difficulty so that every student can be successful.

ELEMENTARY SCENARIOS

V.I.B.
VERY IMPORTANT BOOK PUBLICATIONS

Cathy Greenwald, Contributor
First Grade Teacher
Willowdale Elementary School
Millard Public Schools
Omaha, Nebraska

Writing and publishing our first personal narrative in first grade is a process that combines picture books, storytelling, and teacher modeling. We begin with a picture book by a favorite author. I share this author's philosophy of "writing about people and places she knows about." We spend some time talking about this form of writing.

The next day we begin by sitting in a circle. I tell the students one or two stories from my own real-life experiences. The students then spend a few moments verbally brainstorming some ideas. I pair them up; they sit eye-to-eye, knee-to-knee and tell a personal story or two to a partner. Stories are everything from vacation experiences to helping sick pets get well. We repeat this process over several days, changing partners and narrowing down our stories. Each day we discuss what qualities made stories easier to understand and more enjoyable. By day three students are asked to select the one story they most enjoy telling and stick with it.

On day four, I model writing using one of the stories I previously told to the class. They are given the opportunity to write their stories. Having told their stories so often makes writing come much easier. If a student "gets stuck" during the writing step, I simply ask the child to sit and tell me the story. We work together to write down the most important details. After the writing is finished, I confer with each child individually to edit. Finally we publish the text.

Although this activity is focused on the trait of Ideas and Content it does lend itself to discussion about the trait of Voice. The students experience how important it is to use amazing words to tell the feelings of the story that were so easily conveyed with facial expression and voice level.

After the text is published, students must attend an "Illustrators Meeting" to study the importance of picture clues and details in illustrations.

These first stories may be short in length and sometimes similar in nature, but they are meaningful to the students. Whether one was the storyteller or the story listener personal connections are made between students because of the process involved. The published books are sent home in V.I.B. (Very Important Book) envelopes to share with families. Then they are returned to school and placed in our classroom library where they are read and enjoyed by students.

Nebraska

Middle School

MIDDLE SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

The Middle School division of the Nebraska PreK-16 initiative is composed of middle level educators, district administrators responsible for the selection and implementation of reading and writing curricula, and university staff with a special interest in middle level students. During our discussion of key Language Arts/English learning expectations, we developed the following outline. This summary is not meant to be exclusive, nor is it prioritized in any way. Rather, it is meant to convey an image of a language-rich classroom filled with students engaged in the learning process.

Ali Callahan, Editor
Sixth Grade Teacher
Pound Middle School
Lincoln, Nebraska

Language Arts/English Learning Expectations
MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. As learners, students will
   a. see the purpose of literacy beyond the classroom as a tool for communication
   b. feel proud of the effort they put into literacy learning and projects
   c. view themselves as active member of a community of learners
   d. learn and apply reading and writing strategies that are content area specific
   e. read and write in all curricular areas
   f. understand and utilize the research process

2. As readers, students will
   a. read, read, read (practice)
   b. read and comprehend a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts
   c. develop a personal awareness of reading interests
   d. see reading as a means of communication and enjoyment
   e. continue to improve and apply reading skills and strategies
      (1) identify literal information
      (2) make inferences
      (3) distinguish main ideas from important details
      (4) assess the credibility of the text
      (5) analyze characteristic elements in multiple forms and genres
      (6) summarize important information
      (7) acquire more specific vocabulary across all content areas
      (8) monitor comprehension
      (9) generate and answer questions at various levels (Bloom's taxonomy)
   f. use reading to learn about other cultures
   g. build reading stamina for longer, more complex texts
   h. make connections between reading and personal experience; access prior knowledge

3. As writers, students will
   a. write, write, write (practice)
   b. apply the six-traits of writing
   c. develop a sense of themselves as writers, and feel success as writers
   d. develop an awareness of audience in writing
   e. write, revise, edit
   f. use basic spelling and grammar
   g. write legibly, and/or type accurately

h. explore a variety of writing genres

4. As speakers, students will
   a. communicate with each other about reading and writing
   b. give relevant feedback to others
   c. effectively speak to communicate information in a variety of situations
   d. present appropriate information to a variety of audiences

5. As listeners, students will
   a. listen respectfully to the thoughts and ideas of others
   b. use appropriate active listening body language
   c. respond correctly during an assembly
   d. actively listen and summarize information presented
   e. listen for a variety of purposes

6. Teachers will provide
   a. some freedom of choice for reading/writing assignments and projects
   b. meaningful opportunities for reading/writing in the classroom, at home, and in the community
   c. structured and unstructured reading/writing assignments and projects
   d. teacher-modeled reading/writing activities and guidance as needed
   e. timely feedback from a variety of sources
   f. individual recognition

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERACY

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understandings about Writing, Reading, and Learning*. (Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers. 1998) Tells how to set up writers' workshop and work with young writers using materials and topics that are self-selected by the student.

Darling-Hammond, L. *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching.* (New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. 1997)

Darling-Hammond, L. *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1997) A useful resource for teachers, administrators, and parents interested in school change. Includes helpful professional development ideas.

Fountas and Pinnell. *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6*. (Portsmouth: Heinemann. 2001) Discusses direct instructional approaches with small groups of learners. Techniques focus on reading and writing and are based on students' needs.

Lane, Barry. *Reviser's Toolbox*. (Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press. 1999) Barry Lane presents a collection of wonderful and interesting mini-lessons for writing teachers of any level. Lane gives teachers many strategies that encourage writers to return to a piece of work and improve it through revision. Easy to read and use, creative and practical.

Marzano, R. J. *What Works in Classroom Instruction.* (Aurora, CO: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning. 2000)

Marzano, Robert J. *What Works in Schools: Translating Research Into Action.* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 2003)

Nebraska Department of Education Reading/Writing Website. (< http://www.nde.state.ne.us/read>) The Reading/Writing website through the Nebraska Department of Education offers information about resources, conferences, statewide initiatives, and professional organizations. Sign up to receive information related to literacy education via this webpage.

Robb, Laura. *Teaching Reading in Middle School: A Strategic Approach to Teaching Reading That Improves Comprehension and Thinking*. (New York: Scholastic Professional Books. 2000) Discusses direct instructional approaches with small groups of learners. Techniques focus on reading and writing and are based on students' needs.

Saphire, Gower. *The Skillful Teacher- Fifth Edition.* Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching, Inc. 1997. Lists and explains a variety of teaching techniques/classroom management strategies which foster learning across the curriculum.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCENARIOS

EIGHTH GRADERS READ ACROSS AMERICA

Karin A. Law, Contributor
Eighth Grade Teacher
Mitchell Junior/Senior High School
Mitchell, Nebraska

One of the greatest teaching/learning moments I experience each year is Read Across America Day. My eighth graders bring their favorite childhood storybooks and we go to the elementary school to read to kindergarten through fourth grade students. As a preview of young reader expectations, we practice reading to a more mature audience of our peers. My students listen to my interpretation of *Go Dog Go!* and I explain and model the mannerisms that little kids expect from readers. Reading the same story over again and being sure to use emotion and excitement for their audience is emphasized.

On the big day, the eighth graders express nervousness and excitement because they want to do a good job. Once they start reading and the younger kids lean forward to hear and see the pictures, the nerves melt away. Shy, quiet eighth graders suddenly become animated and humorous storytellers, feeding off their audiences' enthusiasm. The eighth graders walk away with a glow because they have been given hugs, applause, and a sense of accomplishment. What a wonderful way of reinforcing "read, read, read" and the enjoyment that reading provides. The usual eighth grade response the next day is, "Can we do that again?"

This experience allows students to have a meaningful opportunity to be role models for younger children and to reaffirm their own reading abilities. They also re-experience being read to by an adult and a chance to be active listeners and speakers. As learners, eighth grade students are proud of their efforts and look forward to giving reading a second chance. This is so important for teenagers to be able to reflect upon their own reading experiences and to realize that reading should be a daily activity.

Eighth graders are at the perfect stage of their learning development to be exciting role models for younger readers. They want to be looked upon as young adults and knowledgeable, yet still have fun. This reading experience allows them to be the big person and to show little kids that reading is "cool."

LEARNING THROUGH LETTERS

Lynnette Stevens, Contributor
Sixth Grade Teacher
Schuyler Grade Schools
Schuyler, Nebraska

Writing letters is becoming a lost art in the technological age of emails and cell phones. My sixth grade students have several opportunities to write letters throughout the school year. My students also are aware that when they write letters, the letters will be sent.

Our first friendly letter is written in early November to members of the VFW and the American Legion in Schuyler. Each student writes and mails a friendly letter to his/her chosen veteran. Accompanying the letter is a questionnaire asking the veteran about his/her time spent in the military serving our country. This assignment meets three objectives. It teaches students how to write a friendly letter. It connects the student with a new friend. Finally, it gives them insight into a time in history that seems ancient to them. When the veterans return their questionnaires, a friendly letter usually accompanies it. Then the students have the chance to read another friendly letter.

Our business letter is written in February. My students are again paired with a partner. This time the partner is a business in Nebraska which markets a Nebraska-grown (manufactured) product. I find the businesses on the internet, and make sure that I have chosen a wide variety of products. The students then write the business letter inquiring about the company, asking for a sample of the product, and requesting a return letter. We then display the information and sample products we receive.

The last letter we write involves a phone or personal interview of an employed person in our community. The students generate interview questions, set up a time for the interview, and bring the answers back to class. The students then take the responses and create a character sketch about the person they interviewed. They send the character sketch back to the interviewed person along with a friendly letter thanking them for their time.

My goal in writing these three letters is to instill in my students the importance of written communication. I also want my students to become acquainted with other people by requesting my students to step out of their comfort zone.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCENARIOS

THEM BONES!

Lynnette Stevens, Contributor
Sixth Grade Teacher
Schuyler Grade Schools
Schuyler, Nebraska

"Them bones!"
"Them bones!"
"Them dry bones!"
"The toe bone connected t' the ankle bone!"
"The ankle bone connected t' the knee bone!"

A biology skeleton was sitting in the back of a science room not being used! I confiscated it, after asking, and brought it to my classroom. My students use this skeleton as a way to use reading and writing in a meaningful opportunity.

My students are divided into groups of three-five students. Each week one group is given the name of a famous person in history. The person can be from the ancient past like King Tut. Paul Revere was selected as a person in recent history, and George W. Bush made the grade as a modern person in history.

The students are given one week to research their historical figure. They are given a questionnaire with questions asking for facts and information about the character. Then as a group, they write a mini-report about their famous person. The report is framed and hung on the wall in the hall by my room.

As the students are looking for pertinent information, they also need to pay close attention to the type of clothing their character wore. To finish up their reading/writing/history connection the students dress the skeleton to look like their famous person. Included in the costume are a hat and/or wig to cover the skull, and a portrait mask for the face. Then the skeleton is set in the hall next to the mini-report.

My students have learned a lot about historical men and women without even knowing they were studying. I use one twist at the beginning and at the end of the year. I dress the skeleton, and put up the mini-report without naming the character. The students then have to guess who the skeleton character is.

Nebraska

High School

HIGH SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

High school students, at the nexus between late childhood and young adulthood, do not conform to one standard as learners. As a result, the high-school Language Arts/English classroom in Nebraska is neither uniform nor predesigned. Instead, it reflects students whose abilities, in reading as an example, range from a third-grade level to a graduate-student capacity for literary comprehension and insight. Some students bring to language learning their non-English natal language patterns; some, their insufficiencies in vocabulary and comprehension; some, their exposure to an eclectic and fluid language background.

To answer the needs of this wide variety of maturity, intellectuality, and cultural background, the high school division of the PreK-16 Language Arts/English Task Force represents private and public schools; ESUs; district-level administrators; teachers of at-risk, ELL, SPED, gifted, and non-labeled students; teachers at all grade levels; teachers of required as well as elective classes.

The high school division authored its section of the Language Arts/English Expectations and Effective Teaching Practices by recognizing multiple levels of learning abilities apropos for the age group, and by uniting those levels under a unifying structure. This unifying structure is two-pronged: first, that high-school Language Arts/English students be exposed to intellectual abstraction, theory, and metacognition, and, second, that this be complemented with demonstration, application, and individualization.

First, the high-school young adult is a cognitively alive learner for whom thinking itself is a central demand in the high-school Language Arts/English classroom. At whatever level of which the student is capable, a high-school Language Arts/English student is expected to participate in the life of the mind where the learning stimulus is toward scholarship. The high-school Language Arts/English student is asked to think independently and creatively, through a process both of understanding texts and of courageously and independently reassessing them.

Second, the high-school Language Arts/English student applies theory by creating the self through language as a means of connection with the world around him/her. This ability to co-construct the self with what is outside the self is the means by which students recognize that the world shapes them as they shape the world.

Finally, the high-school Language Arts/English student realizes that writing, reading, speaking, and listening are interrelated and unified in the learning process of each student.

Therefore, each subsection of the high school section of this document is divided into both signification and demonstration—for students as learners, writers, readers, and oral communicators.

Anne Cognard, Editor
Lincoln East High School
Lincoln, Nebraska

Special thanks to Linda Beckstead, Bellevue West Senior High School, who compiled and edited the high school resources section of this document. – *The Co-chairs*

Language Arts/English Learning Expectations
HIGH SCHOOL

1. As learners, students will participate by
   a. engaging in inquiry
   b. employing critical thinking skills
   c. valuing other students' contributions and actively participating in classroom learning; contributing positively to the community of learners
   d. developing flexibility and open-mindedness toward the learning process
   e. taking intellectual, emotional, and creative risks by moving beyond set limitations
   f. becoming a member of a diverse literate and literary culture
   g. exercising their ability to create knowledge and to act as agents of change
   h. envisioning themselves as creators
2. Students will demonstrate their learning and abilities through
   a. embracing, accepting, acknowledging reading/writing/speaking/listening as necessary life skills
   b. engaging in the internal and external processes of research as a means to generate knowledge and understanding
   c. generating questions
   d. developing an awareness of individual learning skills and styles
   e. self-evaluating both the processes of learning and the products or end results
   f. using and creating rubrics and exemplars for learning
3. As writers, students will conceptualize themselves as authors by
   a. being comfortable as writers; being motivated to write
   b. understanding themselves as writers in order to develop their own writing voice
   c. acknowledging that writing is an act with consequences, a seeming permanence
   d. recognizing the connections between writing and thinking; recognizing that the act of writing produces meaning-making ideas
   e. perceiving that effective writing balances the needs of the reader, the writer, and the subject
4. Students will demonstrate their writing skills through
   a. writing with proficiency and confidence
   b. seeking opportunities for publishing final products, as appropriate
   c. applying their knowledge of audiences, occasions, and purposes and how these influence their writing products
   d. adapting concepts of writing across the curriculum and beyond the classroom

e. creating articulate written connections between personal experience and the knowledge bases presented

f. writing in and for various media

5. As readers, students will demonstrate how literature affects learning through

a. recognizing the impact and imp ortance of historical and social settings of literature

b. making meaning by connecting the ideas in the text with personal experience

c. using literature as a tool to learn about and become aware of multiple perspectives on gender, culture, history, etc.

d. studying literature in order both to learn ideas and to read for pleasure

e. revisiting previous literary experiences to enrich current literature study

f. appreciating that literature, as a creative form, is an artifact that preserves culture

6. Students will realize the significance of the act of reading by

a. having intentionality while reading in order to understand texts and to read for pleasure

b. understanding that reading is a co-creation: the reader shapes the text as the text shapes the reader

c. becoming aware of the way language manipulates and changes the reader while reading

d. comprehending and connecting literal meanings of text, while ascertaining subtexts that imply meaning and theme

e. assessing and critically evaluating multiple sources of information and social settings of literature

f. reading slowly and carefully to allow reflective thinking

g. monitoring comprehension while reading

h. reading long, complex, and challenging texts

i. acquiring specific vocabulary or terminology or literary devices (ideolect) both at a basic level of knowledge and in order to articulate higher levels of thinking about literature

j. understanding that the act of reading occurs with and for various media

7. As oral communicators, students will develop and demonstrate their effectiveness as speakers through

a. presenting appropriate information to a variety of audiences in a variety of contexts

b. applying effective speaking skills

c. understanding and applying theories of communication

d. recognizing that speaking is an act with consequences

e. acquiring confidence in basic speaking situations such as presenting to a group or participating in a group discussion

f. recognizing cultural codes and language registers for speaking

g. understanding and applying communication theory and its use with other media

8. Students will develop and demonstrate their effectiveness as listeners through

a. exercising a tolerance for ambiguity and dissonance

b. understanding and applying theories of listening

c. understanding that listening is a reciprocal act of communication

d. practicing skills to identify and utilize appropriate information in presented material

e. acknowledging that listening requires a capacity for critical process, then re-applying that process to the art of listening

f. reading verbal and nonverbal cues and interpreting their meaning

g. understanding and applying the listening mode required in a specific context

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING HIGH SCHOOL LITERACY

Atwell, Nancie. *In The Middle* (Second Ed. Heinemann, 1998). This book continues to be a resource that is helpful to the teacher interested in creating a writing workshop classroom. The conversational writing style allows the reader to consider Atwell's thoughts and understand how she views the classroom and teaching. Although targeted for the middle school educator, the strategies and lessons are universal.

Beer, Kylene. *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6-12* (Heinemann, 2003). With reading being an improvement goal at so many schools, sources like Beer's book help not only instructionally, but also to build a personal theory base. Beers is very accessible through stories of her own blunders and successes, as well as current research and reading strategies that work with students.

Bikerts, Sven. *Literature: The Evolving Canon* (Boston: Alleyn J. Bacon, 1996). This book has an excellent section titled "Literature in Translation."

Brooke, Robert. Ed. *Rural Voices: Place Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing*. (NY: Teachers College Press, 2003). This book was written by eight Nebraska teachers (from Cedar Bluffs, Henderson, Peru, Rising City, Staplehurst, Syracuse, Waverly, Wayne) who documented over a three-year period some of the best place-conscious teaching going on in their schools. Barbara Poore of the Rural School and Community Trust writes that this is "a book that is both inspirational and instructive. Their stories of place-conscious writing experiences are woven skillfully with 'how to' instructions for those who want to motivate students to write and to learn to love their place. This book is a wonderful resource for educators and community people who believe in the power of place and the importance of writing."

Elbow, Peter and Pat Belanoff, *A Community of Writers* (Third Ed. Oxford, 2000). This book combines theory and methodology to give the high school educator practical, yet interesting ideas in teaching composition. The book divides its sections into workshops which include activities and a writing assignment. In addition to examining the process of writing, the text also examines genres of writing such as private and public writing, persuasion, research, and the essay. This book is particularly helpful through its use of example and listing of resources.

National Council of Teachers of English (<http://www.ncte.org>) has a valuable website for teachers of all grade levels.

National Writing Project Website (<http://www.writingproject.org>) and the Nebraska Writing Project Website (<http://www.unl.edu/newp/nwp5.htm>) are both useful resources for those who teach writing at all grade levels.

Nebraska Department of Education Reading/Writing Website. (< http://www.nde.state.ne.us/read>.) The Reading/Writing website through the Nebraska Department of Education offers information about resources, conferences, statewide initiatives, and professional organizations. Sign up to receive information related to literacy education via this webpage.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity* (Heinemann, 1992). This book has the same inviting, conversational text as Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*. Rief provides interesting and practical lessons in teaching in a writing workshop classroom. Her book is filled with student samples and sources for creating similar lessons. The appendix provides step-by-step examples of tools she uses in her classroom from a simple book borrowing poster to a reader's-writer's log instructions. Although written for the middle school classroom, her ideas about teaching writing can easily be used in the high school classroom as well.

Spandel, Vicki. *Creating Writers Through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction* (3rd Ed, Allyn & Bacon, 2001). Six-Trait writing instruction is nothing new but reading this text can help improve a composition classroom. It includes excellent narrative and discussion of the use of rubrics in writing instruction. It also encourages English

instructors to empower students to critique their own writing as well as take ownership for the revision and editing of their work instead of solely relying on their teachers to point out strong and weak areas.

Stillman, Peter. *Families Writing* (Calendar Island, 1999) This accessible book combines wisdom of why adults and children connect and repel from writing, but also provides fresh ideas to encourage writing. He gives the reader many examples in this text. These ideas would work well in a classroom, after-school setting, or as family homework.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey, Tanya N. Baker, and Julie Dube. *Strategic Reading: Guiding Students to Lifelong Literacy, 6-12* (Heinemann, 2001). This book begins with teachers' core beliefs about learning, about teaching, and about students. It's not as accessible as Beer's text, but it provides useful examples and strong theoretical basis for reading instruction.

<http://ehs.lps.org/academics/McAuliffe/Default.html>. This website, which is the result of a year-long McAuliffe Fellowship awarded by the Nebraska Department of Education, is an A/P textbook on-line that includes student work titled "Classical Rhetoric Through Multicultural Literature: The Art of Critical Thinking for the Advanced High School Student."

<http://www.phschool.com/advanced/lesson_plans/eng_barnet_2000/index.cfm>. A.P. lesson plans connecting rhetoric with literature co-authored by Dr. Anne Cognard and Dr. Jennifer Cognard-Black.

THE IMPORTANT BOOK ABOUT *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Kristine L. Kuhn, Contributor
Seward High School
Seward, Nebraska

The following activity was hatched during a summer class. I wanted to make *Romeo and Juliet* (hereafter referred to as *R&J*) meaningful to the students and to have the students dig into the text for fun rather than for require ment. I also wanted to step out of center stage and give the play back to the students.

Materials:

- *The Important Book* – by Margaret Wise Brown
- A hat or bowl
- The names of 6 keys characters in *R&J*

The activity begins long before the students actually participate in it. Prior to reading the play as a reader's theater, the students are placed into *R&J* teams. Each member draws a character's name out of the hat and records that name on a blank piece of paper. This is repeated for however many teams exist in the classroom. Each student is told that this is his/her character and that he/she should pay close attention to words and actions of this character. Questions abound about who this person is, why are we doing this and what should I look for, but I merely repeat the directive.

As the play is read over a span of four-five days, the students follow their characters and questions like, "Why did he do something so stupid?" or "Why couldn't she just tell her parents?" start popping up. Some we discuss, others we tease, and we read on while they write on. Students will often say to others, "Look at how your guy messed up this whole thing."

After the play is finished, I then step to the front of the room and read the children's story – *The Important Book*, by Margaret Wise Brown. I love the looks of "What the heck does that have to do with anything?" I ask the students what pattern of writing they see in the children's book. They note that the first line is repeated at the end with the word "but" added at the start. They note that the first and last lines are what is most important about the object and that the middle lines serve to show what else is interesting about the object, but not necessarily the most important. I remind them they chose a character and have followed his/her progress through the play. They are to create their own "important page" about their characters. They are given an example of one of the lesser characters, and they are given instructions as to how to integrate text and how to provide a symbolic illustration for their page. Each student drafts his/her page for homework.

Students bring their drafted pages to their teams and the teams, using the provided rubric, work to fine tune, to augment, to pare down etc the individual pages. Then the teams must create the final page of the book that begins, "The important thing about the play *Romeo and Juliet* is that…." They follow the same pattern as before and create statements of learning, questioning etc. All the while, they must use text to support their statements.

Finally, the teams create a cover that is titled, "The Important Book About Romeo and Juliet." Again, the rubric provided guides them through. The following day the books are assembled with final copies of individual pages placed after the cover and before the group page. The students then share their books with each other. This elicits comments like, "I didn't think of that for my character" or "Hey, we thought the same thing about the play!"

I am consistently pleased with the inquiry, teamwork, stretching, discovery and understanding that goes on, and the best part about it is I am not the one providing the information. Individually and cooperatively, the students are finding out and articulating what this play means to them and how they view its impact.

MILTON AND MORRISON

Anne Cognard, Contributor
East High School
Lincoln, Nebraska

In the novel *Jazz,* Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison poeticizes the grit of living by concluding the novel with: "I envy them their public love. I myself have only known it in secret, shared it in secret and longed, aw longed to show it--to be able to say out loud what they have no need to say at all: *That I have loved only you, surrendered my whole self reckless to you and nobody else....* But I can't say that aloud.... If I were able I'd say it. Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now." With that "Now" and the cadence that leads us to it, we are invited by Morrison to move and sway rhythmically, jazz-like, to the bass twang and blues sultriness of a 1926 Harlem Renaissance where "the hair of the first class of colored nurses was declared unseemly for the official Bellevue nurse's cap."

It would seem that Morrison's *Jazz* has nothing whatsoever in common with John Milton and his majestic, ponderous, consciously classical 17-century epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, whose stated purpose is "To justify the ways of God to men." How can the slow-slant of Morrison's finale speak in any way to the powerful ousting of Adam and Eve from Eden in Milton's final couplet: "They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow/Through Eden took their solitary way." These writers may speak the same language, but do they, at all, speak the same language? Yes. The final unit in Advanced Placement Language and Composition requires students to put together all they've learned during a year in which "composition" has come to mean the humanistic value of ideas displayed through students' conscious language choices for the purpose of constructing themselves. I firmly believe we are what we say; we are what we write; and we say and we write what we think. Writing is ourselves--nothing less than the very soul of the self--created on paper; writing is the capacity for any student to co-construct a text with the reader so that the "meaning" of who we are is a collaborative relationship with an audience. After a year of writing every week, creatively and analytically, and through a progressive study of Invention, Organization, and Style, this culminating unit in AP is the student's magnum opus. For 2001, the concluding unit required students to juxtapose Toni Morrison and John Milton.

We had begun the year with Morrison's *Beloved*, a hard, almost impenetrable text. We used it to study narrative and authorial voice (ethos), to aid students in creating their own authorial voices (i.e., we are what we write). At the end of the year, we returned to Morrison, ironically by reading Milton, specifically noting his use of figurative language. After studying critical writings on Milton's "style," students then wrote, in iambic pentameter, a non-existent Book XIII of *Paradise Lost*, employing their own figurative language as a demonstration of their perception of humanity's "self." To find that voice, we brought Adam and Eve, the metaphoric progenitors of humankind, into the 21st century by giving them a chance not only to experience retroactively what had actually occurred with their progeny, but also to allow them the last word--"to justify the ways of humanity to itself," if you will. Then, we turned to *Jazz*, analyzing Morrison's figurative language on a whole new level, not as words on a page, but as musical notes, musical notations, the text itself as music, an actual piece of jazz with motifs, improvisations, sounds, rhythms, dissonance, cacophanies, and tonalities. To this point, then, students had had the chance at creative writing (Book XIII of *PL*) and analytic writing (*Jazz* as music) from two very different writers--a dead, white male and a contemporary woman of color. Finally, we wrote a Socratic Dialogue--Morrison with Milton--on the subject of language and text as meaning, the "Word" made real. This Dialogue was Morrison and Milton's respective response to the following questions: Does language and the relatively slow form of the written word count in this century of fast-paced computers and instant e-mail? Is there a place for writing *as writing* in the future? And can writing, if it is to exist, incorporate both the classical old and the postmodern new?

My contention is that whether a student has an ACT of 33 or 20, this assignment indicates each student's capacity for thought, for creativity, and for independence in "reading" a text and in constructing themselves as their own text. I agree with education theorist Robert Probst: my job is to teach students to think, not what to think. Students, through

writing and thinking, determine themselves as in-process works of art on their way to becoming the makers of our community. As they work and rework the old and new through the reconfigurations of language--their own and others; as they recognize their right to stand not on the shoulders of giants, but beside them, giants themselves, they come to know their own worth through writing. They themselves, therefore, are the measure to gauge success, not me. "Success" is not an absolute standard established arbitrarily by a teacher or a community; success is students' perception of themselves as thinkers. This final AP assignment allows students that right.

HIGH SCHOOL SCENARIOS

SLAYING DRAGONS

Dorothy Apley, Contributor
Fillmore Central High School
Geneva, Nebraska

This is a ninth grade unit, starting with the reading of Homer's *The Odyssey*. Throughout their reading, students learn the characteristics of a hero's journey. They learn that a hero's journey is not always clear and is full of dangers, loneliness and temptation. Often on the journey, the hero will make a trip through the underworld and is transformed in the process. The person the hero becomes on the quest is more important than the quest itself.

After reading, the students analyze a movie, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, based on the same criteria of a hero's journey. Jones' quest actually is the "father" quest (like Telemachus in *The Odyssey*.) Jones' growth through the dangers and trials is more important than the quest itself.

The students next start to imagine themselves as heroes. They begin by reading about the concept of dragons and how and when it originated. A series of short stories is read, beginning with *Sigurd the Dragon Slayer*. This story has a "real" dragon that is slain by the hero.

Following these readings, the students read *The 51st Dragon*, realizing the "real" dragon is cowardice. The students read other stories, such as *The Lottery*, *The Rocking Horse Winner,* and *Flowers for Algernon*. The students identify other "dragons" such as the fear of change or fear of people who are different. Students then are asked to identify their own dragons. They spend time brainstorming possibilities and visualizing their dragons, including their size, color, shape, and personality. Students write introductions describing their dragons, then conference with the teacher to make sure they understand the requirements and include the necessary information in their introductions.

The next three paragraphs must include when the students acquired their dragons, a time the dragons defeated the students, and a time when the students defeated the dragons. Students use a revision guideline before they write their first draft.

Students use the revision guide during peer conferencing, which helps them improve their drafts. The same procedure is followed for the last three paragraphs, which include the strategies they plan to use to defeat their dragons, a prediction of what will happen to their dragons, and a comparison/contrast to a character from their short story unit. Students rewrite their drafts and conduct a second peer conference for mechanics, using the editing symbols discussed prior to the conference.

When the final draft is finished, students create a hand-drawn (or computer-drawn) cover, picturing the dragon. Students have the option of constructing a three-dimensional depiction of their dragon, using materials of their choice (fabric, welded sculpture, etc.). The unit ends by sharing the final products with other class members.

USING THE RESEARCH PROJECT TO CREATE AGENTS OF CHANGE

Linda Beckstead, Contributor
Bellevue West High School
Bellevue, Nebraska

There are fifteen of us, including me, brainstorming ideas for the upcoming research project. Unlike most eleventh grade English classrooms where students are asked to analyze a literary work or research a topic of interest, the question before these students is to consider how they can change their school or community.

Many of the students in this at-risk classroom have failed an English class at least once, some are in the court system, and in this school of nearly 1400 students, the administrators are familiar with names on my class list. That's why this research unit can be so powerful—it gives students a voice in the school and community where they are still trying to negotiate its rules and discover their niche to ease them into adulthood.

Each year that I have asked for topics, food and tardies are popular considerations. But eventually, on this Monday morning at the start of the new unit, the discussion becomes global. The students wonder about teenage profiling and why Bellevue has the earliest curfew in the metro—10:00 p.m. seven days a week. We also talk about consistency regarding school rules and grade appropriate curriculum—students want to know how teachers decide what to teach.

This year the chosen topics divide the class into three groups to analyze dress code, reading curriculum and city curfew. The goal is to research the subject at the school, city, and if possible, state level to analyze the topic and make suggestions for change.

Perhaps what gives this project an authenticity that I can't generate as a teacher is its audience. The principal has typically participated in this unit and his attendance during the group presentations is of immeasurable value. He is the person to whom the students need to address their concerns about school policies, but without this project, they lack what they see as a viable venue. His exchange of ideas during the presentations validates their suggestions and reinforces their efforts to produce a quality product with accurate and useful research. This year, the students studying the reading curriculum forward their presentation to the district coordinator to share with the committee reviewing grade level reading lists. The timing of the students' project and recent creation of the district committee is coincidental and hopefully mutually beneficial.

About two weeks after the research project has ended, we are studying poetry when the principal stops me in the hall. He wants to visit my English class to tell the students that hats would be allowed at the fundraiser as a result of their presentation. Although not groundbreaking to adults, influencing the principal to bend a school rule is groundbreaking to a student. At the start of their research unit, I told students that some of their work would plant seeds of change that they would reap later. Unpredicted but perfectly timed, the fundraiser reinforces a tangential lesson of the unit: the students do have a voice and we are listening.

Nebraska

Postsecondary

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING IN COLLEGE

A Statement of the Nebraska PreK-16 Postsecondary English Consortium[1]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Postsecondary English Consortium (PEC) is a division of the Nebraska PreK-16 Language Arts/English Task Force. The PEC includes 32 faculty members from English and English Education, representing 16 institutions across the state, including the university system, the state college system, two-year colleges, independent universities and colleges, and the Nebraska Department of Education.

The purpose of this document is to spur discussion about a key educational transition: the move from high school to college. We have had a series of spirited conversations on this topic, and we now invite other stakeholders – fellow teachers in higher education and across grade levels, students, and all those who help students learn – to think with us about how, together, we can help students successfully cross this crucial educational threshold.

We present our contribution to what we hope is an inclusive, ongoing conversation in four parts:

1) **Observations about Nebraska's 12th Grade Reading and Writing Standards**

   - We identify one connection and two disconnections between state standards and our expectations for incoming students.
     - ✓ *Connection*: We find that the standards articulate a solid, skills-based foundation for college-level work.
     - ✓ *Disconnections:* We find that the standards do not articulate robust conceptions of 1) rhetorical awareness and 2) dispositional goals.

2) **Key Learning Expectations for First-Year College Students**

   - We identify our shared learning expectations for students as
     - ✓ Learners
     - ✓ Writers
     - ✓ Readers
     - ✓ Speakers
     - ✓ Listeners

3) **Resources for Teaching and Learning College English**

   - We offer brief descriptions of a range of useful resources – books, professional journals, websites, and organizations – for teaching and learning English at the college level.

4) **Scenarios**

   - We offer several short but detailed narratives and descriptions of classroom projects and interactions.

[1] Copies of this postsecondary statement may be obtained by writing to Chris Gallagher, Associate Professor of English, 202 Andrews Hall, University of Nebraska, 68588-0333.

I. Observations about Nebraska's 12th Grade Reading and Writing Standards

The PEC is the first broadly representative professional body of English and English Education faculty in higher education to review and respond to the state's Grade 12 Reading and Writing Standards (as adopted by the Nebraska State Board of Education, September 7, 2001). We examined the standards under the guidance of Kim Larson, Director of Reading/Writing Education for the Nebraska Department of Education. Ms. Larson introduced us to the history of the standards, offered a brief overview of each standard, and led us through activities in which we explored connections and disconnections between the standards and our expectations for incoming college students.

Connections:

The standards articulate a solid, skills-based foundation for college-level work. We found little difficulty finding connections between the skills identified in the reading, writing, and speaking standards and our expectations for first-year students. For **reading**, we expect our incoming students to understand and be able to identify textual elements such as main idea and supporting details (12.1.1), classification characteristics (12.1.3), theme (12.1.4), literary techniques (12.1.5), organizational elements (12.1.6), and so on. For **writing**, we expect a grounding in common writing conventions (12.2.1), an ability to focus and organize writing (12.2.2), an ability to revise and edit (12.2.3), and an ability to generate questions, take notes, summarize, and outline (12.2.5). Particularly important to us is standard 12.2.3: "By the end of twelfth grade, students will use multiple forms to write for different audiences and purposes." (However, we note that several PEC members question the ability of the Statewide Writing Assessment to measure this standard.) For **speaking**, we expect our incoming students to be able to lead discussions (12.3.1), and to make effective oral presentations (12.3.2). While these are all points of connection, we note the absence of skill-based **listening** standards at the 12th grade level.

Disconnections:

1. *The standards do not articulate a robust conception of rhetorical awareness.* By rhetorical awareness, we mean an understanding of how *context* informs literate practice: how reading, writing, speaking, and listening are shaped by the situation in which they occur, including the effects of audience, venue, medium, available technologies, etc. For incoming college students, we expect rhetorical awareness across the four language arts:

    - The **reading** standards focus on identifying elements of texts – main idea and supporting details, theme, literary techniques, organizational elements, etc. – but none asks students to go beyond what is *in* texts to explore how texts interact with their environment. (The example indicators for standard 12.1.8, which invoke "the author's political ideology," may move in this direction, but the language of the standard itself – "demonstrate the ability to analyze literary words, nonfiction, films, and media" – does not support rhetorical awareness.)
    - Similarly, although **writing** standard 12.2.4 indicates that students will write in multiple forms for different audiences and purposes, the writing standards are similarly focused on textual elements – conventions of standard English and focus/organization – or on specific writing practices: revising and editing, generating questions, note taking, summarizing, and outlining.
    - Although the state standards identify oral performance and student-led discussion as goals for **speaking**, we expect that incoming college students will have rhetorical awareness for speaking equal to that for writing. They should, for instance, be aware of the ways diction, content, *ethos*, and style all shift because of interaction with different audiences.
    - **Listening** is absent in the 12th grade standards. But this language art, too, is shaped by the rhetorical context in which it occurs.

2. *The standards do not identify important dispositional goals for student learning*. Missing from the standards altogether are dispositional, or attitudinal, goals – intellectual curiosity, active engagement in learning, willingness to experiment, and so on. Absent these, students will not be prepared to succeed in college, no matter how many skills they have acquired. We are aware that the state has formulated measurable "content standards," and that dispositional qualities are very difficult to measure. However, education is much more than the acquisition of easily measured cognitive skills. A skilled but passive or disengaged student is not truly a

learner. And the best-prepared student for college is just that: a true learner – prepared, and eager, to engage in meaningful inquiry.

As we close this section, we want to underscore the significance of dispositional goals at a time when educational reform too often consists of skills-based checklists and standardized testing, both of which marginalize dispositions in favor of an impoverished, mechanized approach to teaching and learning. We applaud our Nebraska's local control approach to education, and urge policymakers at the state and local levels to protect and enhance teachers' ability to teach literacy as a complex cognitive and social practice, not a set of isolated and watered-down "user-skills."

Language Arts/English Learning Expectations
POSTSECONDARY

Our aim in this section is to identify key learning expectations for college students during their first academic year. We do so with the understanding that designing classrooms and curricula is a local responsibility and prerogative. Our intention is not to trump local practice by proposing enforceable standards or outcomes, but rather to guide it by articulating widely shared professional *expectations.*

Because literacy involves a complex web of capacities and dispositions, the categories below should be understood as mutually reinforcing.

1. As learners, students will

    a. *develop intellectual curiosity, habits of mind consistent with active learning*. Absent an active investment in their own education, students' experiences in school will be mechanical at best, alienating at worst. Effective learners are "intentional learners"; they *want* to learn.

    b. *think critically*. Critical thinking entails a rhetorical, evidence-based evaluation of multiple perspectives, as well as the ability to situate one's own thinking vis-à-vis those perspectives with an awareness of what is at stake in doing so. Effective learners seek out and analyze the values, interests, and assumptions underwriting perspectives other than (but including) their own.

    c. *experiment, explore, and take risks.* Effective learners do much more than memorize or build skills; they also have the kind of intellectual courage it takes to try out new, unfamiliar ideas and perspectives. They take on increasingly complex intellectual work, even though they understand that acquired skills might occasionally regress as they do so.

    d. *reflect on and evaluate their own learning*. Effective learners understand their strengths and challenges as learners, and they make decisions and develop learning strategies based on that understanding.

    e. *view themselves as active members of literate and literary culture*. An important part of being an effective learner in college is seeing oneself as contributing to the intellectual life of the institution and to various other communities of literate and literary practice.

    f. *learn independently when appropriate*. Effective learners participate in many social networks, but they also display the ability, when called upon, to undertake self-motivated, self-directed learning.

2. As writers, students will

    a. *write, write, write*. Writers develop first and foremost through practice – through writing. Effective writers know that writing is a discipline that requires constant, sustained practice.

    b. *view writing as a meaningful activity.* Effective writers see value in their work; they are personally invested in writing because it has value for them.

    c. *develop their own purposes for writing.* This follows from (b). Effective writers are not driven solely by an external motivation such as a grade; they discover or create personally significant aims for their writing.

d. *write for a variety of purposes and audiences (rhetorical contexts), and in a variety of media and forms.* Writing is situational, and effective writers are versatile and agile users of language. They are able to assess and successfully negotiate a wide range of writing situations.

e. *understand and develop their writing process.* Effective writers understand their strengths and challenges as writers, and they self-consciously fashion a writing process (or several) in accordance with their purposes and goals.

f. *understand and use writing as a cognitive tool*. Effective writers understand that writing is more than a simple transcription of what they have already thought; they comprehend it as a form of thinking, a way of developing (not merely reporting) concepts, knowledge, beliefs, and values.

g. *draw on available resources to support their work as writers.* This might include reading for models, gathering feedback from a trusted reader, or participating in writing groups. Effective writers understand that writing is a highly interactive process, not a solitary pursuit.

h. *revise their own writing.* This goes beyond mere editing (though the latter skill is important as well). We have in mind the ability to re-vision (to re-see) one's own texts with fresh eyes and new perspectives. Effective writers return to their drafts in order to rework ideas, not simply change words.

i. *conduct research **through** writing and incorporate research **into** writing*. Writing is both a form of inquiry and a means of expressing the results of inquiry. Effective writers conduct primary and secondary research through writing, and locate, assess, and incorporate others' research into their own texts.

3. As readers, students will

a. *read, read, read*. Readers develop first and foremost through practice – through reading. Effective writers know that reading is a discipline that requires constant, sustained practice.

b. *view reading as a meaningful activity*. Effective readers see value in their work; they are personally invested in reading because it has value for them. In short, they *want* to read.

c. *develop their own purposes for reading*. This follows from (b). Effective readers are not driven solely by an external motivation such as a grade; they discover or create personally significant aims for their reading.

d. *understand and develop their reading process.* Effective readers develop what researchers call "metacognitive" awareness – that is, an understanding of *how* they are making meaning from texts. Moreover, they develop an array of reading strategies in order to become agile, adaptable readers.

e. *read texts written for a variety of purposes and audiences (rhetorical contexts), and in a variety of media and forms.* Effective readers read all kinds of imaginative and academic texts, from novels, poetry, and drama to journal articles and institutional documents. They understand how rhetorical contexts shape texts.

f. *understand and use reading as a cognitive tool*. Effective readers understand that reading is more than a simple retrieval of information; they comprehend it as a form of thinking, a way of developing concepts, knowledge, beliefs, and values.

g. *develop an appreciation for complexity, ambiguity, and dissonance*. Reading is more than simply "getting information"; it also involves engaging ideas and perspectives that are difficult and challenging. Effective readers embrace such challenges, and they understand that learning often derives from discomfort or disorientation.

h. *view texts as a resource for learning about diversity and difference.* One of the great virtues of reading is that it introduces us to ideas, perspectives, people, and cultures with which we are not familiar. Effective readers use reading as a tool for learning about others.

i. *critically evaluate a variety of sources of information.* Perhaps no ability is more important in the Information Age than the capacity to assess the reliability and usefulness of various sources of information, whether oral, print, or electronic. Effective readers are "critical consumers" of information, carefully inspecting the interests, values, and purposes of those who proffer that information.

4. As speakers, students will

a. *speak, speak, speak*. Speakers develop first and foremost through practice – through speaking. Effective speakers know that speaking is a discipline that requires constant, sustained practice.

b. *view speaking as a meaningful activity.* Effective speakers see value in their work; they are personally invested in speaking because it has value for them.

c. *develop their own purposes for speaking.* This follows from (b). Effective speakers are not driven solely by an external motivation such as a grade; they discover or create personally significant aims for their speaking.

d. *understand and develop their own speaking process.* Effective speakers understand their strengths and challenges as speakers, and they develop an array of speaking strategies based on their purposes and goals.

e. *speak for variety of purposes and audiences (rhetorical contexts).* Speaking – the original rhetorical art – is situational, and effective speakers are versatile and agile users of language. They are able to "read" and successfully negotiate a wide range of speaking situations.

f. *understand and use speaking as a cognitive tool*. Effective speakers understand that speaking is more than a simple enunciation of what they have already thought; they comprehend it as a form of thinking, a way of developing (not merely reporting) concepts, knowledge, beliefs, and values.

g. *develop confidence in their speaking voice(s)*. Effective speakers display their authority through poise and self-assurance; they project a confident, knowledgeable speaking persona (or *ethos,* in Aristotelian terms).

h. *select and use contextually-appropriate media*. Effective speakers use technology that suits the rhetorical context. They develop an ability to "read" the media needs of a variety of speaking situations, and to put their chosen technology to appropriate use.

5. As listeners, students will

a. *listen, listen, listen*. Listeners develop first and foremost through practice – through listening. Effective listeners know that listening is a discipline that requires constant, sustained practice.

b. *view listening as a meaningful activity*. Effective listeners see value in the work and words of others; they are personally invested in listening because it has value for them.

c. *develop their own purposes for listening*. This follows from (b). Effective listeners discover or create personally significant aims for their listening.

d. *understand and develop their listening process*. Effective listeners understand their strengths and challenges as listeners, and they develop an array of listening strategies based on their purposes and goals.

e. *listen for a variety of purposes and audiences*. Listening—another of the original rhetorical arts—is situational, and effective listeners are versatile and agile recipients of language. They are able to engage and successfully adapt to a wide range of rhetorical contexts.

f. *understand and use listening as a cognitive tool*. Effective listeners understand that listening is more than a simple reception process; they comprehend it as a form of thinking, a way of developing concepts, knowledge, beliefs, and values.

g. *use listening to learn about diversity and difference*. Effective listeners seek out and engage a variety of voices. They understand that listening to others is an important way to become educated in the ideas, perspectives, people, and cultures of the world.

h. *critically evaluate texts in a variety of audio and visual media*. Effective listeners accurately assess the reliability and usefulness of various sources of oral information. Effective listeners are "critical consumers" of information, and carefully consider the interests, values, and purposes of those who proffer that information.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING POSTSECONDARY ENGLISH

Each text below was nominated and annotated by a PEC member.

Bernstein, Susan Naomi. *Teaching Developmental Writing*. (Boston: Bedford, 2001) Looks at teaching developmental writing from a teacher and student perspective and offers insight into basic writing focusing on teaching the writing process, grammar instruction, working with EFL students and adult learners, critical thinking, technology, learning styles, and writing centers.

Brooke, Robert. Ed. *Rural Voices: Place Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing*. (NY: Teachers College Press, 2003) This book was written by eight Nebraska teachers (from Cedar Bluffs, Henderson, Peru, Rising City, Staplehurst, Syracuse, Waverly, Wayne) who documented over a three-year period some of the best place-conscious teaching going on in their schools. Barbara Poore of the Rural School and Community Trust writes that this is "a book that is both inspirational and instructive. Their stories of place-conscious writing experiences are woven skillfully with 'how to' instructions for those who want to motivate students to write and to learn to love their place. This book is a wonderful resource for educators and community people who believe in the power of place and the importance of writing."

Cameron, Julia. *The Artist's Way: a Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1992) A comprehensive twelve-week program for recovering creativity, Cameron's book has a variety of exercises and activities that teachers might use to free students from blocks that inhibit their writing. For example, readers are told to make a list following the phrase "If I didn't have to do it perfectly, I would try…", or list ten things they would love to do but are not allowed to do, or write a thank you letter to themselves.

Clark, Irene. *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003) This book explores a number of key concepts in composition and rhetoric – process, invention, revision, genre, audience, assessment, etc. Each chapter historicizes the concept, discusses the scholarly controversies around it, explores classroom practices, provides writing activities for teachers, points to useful resources, and includes a reading or two. This is a useful tool for reflective practice, since it weaves intellectual inquiry with specific classroom work.

***College Composition and Communication.* NCTE. (*journal*)** The "flagship" journal for the field of composition and rhetoric. Includes articles on language, writing, and the teaching of writing at the college level. See **http://www.ncte.org/ccc/ex.html.**

Composition Studies (journal). This is perhaps the most teaching-focused of the major composition and rhetoric journals. It normally includes feature articles, review essays, book reviews, exchanges, and "course designs" (syllabi and rationales). It takes up issues related to the teaching of writing from first-year courses through doctoral education, including language and diversity, assessment, critical and feminist pedagogies, voice in writing, genre theory and research, interdisciplinary approaches to writing, and so on. See http://condor.depaul.edu/~compstud

***Computers and Composition: An International Journal for Teachers of Writing*. University of Texas-Austin. 12 May 2003 http://corax.cwrl.utexas.edu/cac/**. An online journal devoted to technology and writing instruction. Includes practical and theoretical articles.

Cooper, Charles R. and Lee Odell. *Evaluating Writing: The Role of Teachers' Knowledge about Text, Learning and Culture*. (Urbana: NCTE, 1999) This collection of essays speaks to the challenges teachers face in evaluating writing by high school and college students. The first section–"Describing Texts"–contains essays that focus on ways of pointing to the significant intellectual work that is happening (almost happening or not yet happening) in students' writing and describing for ourselves and our students what we see in those textual moments. The second and third sections–"Assessing Writing-to-Learn in Four Disciplines" and "Supporting the Writing of Dual-Language Students"–guide teachers in working through the challenges and opportunities specifically associated with such

work. The last section, "Issues in Assessment," addresses concerns that cut across particular teaching contexts (e.g., issues in large-scale assessment, creating a climate for portfolios, etc.).

Deans, Thomas. ***Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Reading*****. (New York: Longman Publishers, 2003)** This textbook concentrates on ways to write about social action and community involvement. It includes reading selections from people like Donald Murray, Paulo Freire, and Toni Cade Bambara, among others. It also includes student sample writings and peer review questions.

Elbow, Peter. ***Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing and Teaching Writing*****. (New York: Oxford U P, 2000)** This collection of essays by Peter Elbow (a longtime spokesperson for process approaches) includes some of his most popular essays on aspects of teaching writing. What makes this book interesting is, as the author says in his introduction, that he has "selected among [previously published] essays and parts of essays, and done some rewriting of what I've chosen, in order to get [this material] to work together more coherently in a single book." The project of this book, then, is to take these celebrated essays and other material and use/revise them to build a conversation about process approaches to college writing classrooms.

Elbow, Peter and David Bartholomae. "Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow" and "Interchanges: Responses to Bartholomae and Elbow." In ***Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*****. Victor Villanueva, editor. (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997)** Each time I read this exchange between Elbow, an "expressivist," and Bartholomae, a "social-constructionist," I rethink my conception of the writing classroom, the role of the teacher in relation to the student, and the role of first-year writing. It asks big questions and doesn't offer conclusions, but it provides an extremely compelling dialogue to which my students and I are challenged to respond and contribute.

ERIC Educational Resources Information Center**. Indiana University <http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/>.** An online treasure trove of education-related resources. Abstracts, some full article available through this website.

Ford, Marjorie and Elizabeth Schave. ***Community Matters: A Reader for Writers*****. (New York: Longman Publishers, 2002)** This textbook is a combination of chapters on the reading and writing process, including research writing. It has a good variety and number of readings organized thematically, like "A Sense of Place" or "Family," etc. The authors are from two different disciplines; one is a writing instructor and the other is a program director for a non-profit organization.

Gallagher, Chris. ***Radical Departures: Composition and Progressive Pedagogy*****. (Urbana, IL:NCTE, 2002)** This book clearly and carefully traces the role of "progressive politics" in writing instruction both in secondary and postsecondary schools. Particularly useful is Gallagher's conception of pedagogy as "the reflexive inquiry that teachers and learners undertake together" (xvi). He offers a compelling argument for pedagogy-centered disciplinarity, curricula, and outreach. In his intraludes, stories between chapters, we are invited to reflect on these visions as they are enacted in specific sites.

Heritage Room, Bennett Martin Public Library. Lincoln Public Libraries, NE. This special collections room has many first edition, autographed, rare, and out-of-print books that particularly pertain to the study of Nebraska and its literature and culture.

Johns, Jerry L. and Roberta L. Berglund. ***Strategies for Content Area Reading*****. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 2000)** I use this text in a class on teaching reading in the secondary school, but I also use many of the strategies in my college courses. They include pre-reading activities like anticipation guides or K W L Strategy Sheets (What We Know, What We Want To Find Out, What We Learned), or strategies to help in discussion, such as Intra Act or Discussion Webs.

Knowledge Exchange. Daedalus Group. 2003 <http://www.daedalus.com/exchange.asp>. Although some of this site's information is keyed toward the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment product, the bulk of the material is invaluable for anyone teaching writing in a technological environment; see especially the "Teachers' FAQ", Articles by Teachers, and Lists of Ten.

Lee, Amy. ***Composing Critical Pedagogies: Teaching Writing as Revision.*** **(Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000)** A useful tool for becoming a reflective practitioner. Lots of classroom narratives,

interwoven with theory. Lee invites us into her classroom, and challenges us with complex ideas about what it means to teach writing. We have used this book for our TA course at UNL for several years running now.

Lindemann, Erika and Daniel Anderson. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. 4th ed. (New York: Oxford UP, 2001) A helpful text for novice composition instructors. Focuses more on theory and research than practical help, but provides essential understandings of rhetoric, cognition, linguistics, and the writing process.

McCleery, David and Kira Gale, eds. Friends of Nebraska Literature, Nebraska Center for the Book. *Resource Guide to Six Nebraska Authors*. (Lincoln, NE: Slow Tempo Press, 1991) This guide gives annotated bibliographies of works for six authors, including Willa Cather, Bess Streeter Aldrich, and Mari Sandoz. It also gives much other information, such as useful resources (videos, explanations of places to visit, etc.) for teaching about these writers.

Murray, Donald M. *Write to Learn*. 7th ed. (Boston: Heinle, 2001) An accessible and practical text with a wealth of useful guidance for any writer.

National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement. School of Education, University of Albany. 1 May 2003. <http://cela.albany.edu>. This research center has been operating since 1987, and attempts to gather and disseminate findings on national trends, best practices, effective methods in English Learning. It is a very useful site for getting, at a glance, a sense of how your program fits into the national scene, and for sensible support of well-considered English teaching. For instance, its "Features of Middle and High School Instruction" research project found six features of highly effective English teaching from its surveys of many schools across the nation—and those features are the sort that support teacher's own design of good curriculum over lock-step checklists of objectives. The Research Center seems to publish most everything it does on-line, which makes for easy access.

National Writing Project. <http://www.writingproject.org>. The National Writing Project (NWP) is a nationwide professional development program for teachers, begun in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley. The primary goal of the project is to improve student writing achievement by improving the teaching of writing in the nation's schools. The NWP receives federal funding which it currently grants to 175 local sites in 50 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Sites operate from university campuses and collaborate with surrounding schools and districts. Collectively, these sites serve approximately 100,000 teachers every year, grades kindergarten through university, in all disciplines. The NWP model is based on the belief that teachers are the key to education reform, teachers make the best teachers of other teachers, and teachers benefit from studying and conducting research.

Nebraska Department of Education Reading/Writing Website. (< http://www.nde.state.ne.us/read>) The Reading/Writing website through the Nebraska Department of Education offers information about resources, conferences, statewide initiatives, and professional organizations. Sign up to receive information related to literacy education via this webpage.

Nebraska Writing Project. University of Nebraska-Lincoln. <http://www.unl.edu/newp/nwp5.html>. The Nebraska Writing Project (NeWP) is Nebraska's site of the National Writing Project, one of the oldest in the nation (starting in 1978). NeWP offers yearly Institutes on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus and in rural communities throughout Nebraska, as well as year-round continuity and inservice programs for teachers.

NETV. Nebraska Public Television. Shows many fine programs about not only Nebraska writers but also a variety of writers from American to European to Latin American. These programs are well researched, providing valuable, approachable information about writers' lives and writing careers, and are usually available for purchase for a relatively nominal fee (about $20 per video). In recent years I've seen programs about American writers Mark Twain, Richard Wright, Kate Chopin, and Edith Wharton, just to name a few.

Ostrom, Hans, Wendy Bishop, and Katharine Haake, editors, *Metro: Journeys in Writing Creatively*. (NY: Longman, 2001) This book is an excellent resource for assignments that enable invention, development, experimentation, revision, and editing. While often employed by creative writers at Creighton, I find it useful for helping students engage writing strategies used across genres, and for thinking about the rhetorical and poetic choices available to them.

OWL—Online Writing Lab. Purdue University. 6 May 2003. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>. This website is a useful resource for students, teachers, and anyone interested in writing. It features over 200 handouts in the following general categories: General Writing Concerns, English as a Second Language, Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation, Research and Documenting Sources, Professional Writing, and Writing Across the Curriculum. It also has PowerPoint presentations available to download on topics such as the writing process, basics of argument, sentence structure, MLA and APA format, email etiquette, and resumes. It even conducts hypertext workshops on topics such as technical report writing, evaluating sources, and searching the Internet. Their tutors respond to questions about writing from all over the world through their email tutorial service at their website. The website offers all of this and more; it is definitely worth visiting.

Research Room, Nebraska State Historical Society. (Lincoln, NE) If you can take students on a field trip, you can arrange with the staff there to show students actual letters and other documents from Nebraska writers that are available there. These are things that are more appropriate to college-level students, but accelerated high school students could appreciate them as well.

Reynolds, Mark. *Two-Year College English: Essays for a New Century*. (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994) Excellent resource that sheds light on issues surrounding students, faculty, and curriculum, and where two-year college English has come from and is going.

***Romantic Circles*. University of Maryland. (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>)** A wonderland of material for teaching Romantic period lit and culture.

Ross, Carolyn and Ardel Thomas. *Writing for Real*. (New York: Longman Publishers, 2003) This textbook helps define and divide various steps in real or social writing through such headings as "Conceptualizing Service-Learning," "Groundwork: Understanding Your Service Learning Project," and "Construction Zones: Fulfilling Your Service-Learning Assignments."

Speakers Bureau. Nebraska Humanities Council. Provides expert presenters on a variety of literary topics and literature from various cultures for a relatively nominal fee ($50).

Stahl, Norman and Hunter Boylan. *Teaching Developmental Reading: Historical, Theoretical, and Practical Background Readings*. (Boston: Bedford, 2003) This book is just what it says—an excellent collection of articles as a background resource for those teaching reading to college students. Deals with issues of the reading/writing connection, reading in content areas, EFL readers, technology, and praxis and paradigms.

***Teacher Talk*. NCTE. 29 August 2002 <http://serv1.ncte.org/lists/>**. Provides links to the array of email lists sponsored by NCTE that are devoted to various aspects of teaching.

Teaching English in the Two-Year College. This is a highly teaching-centered journal published quarterly by NCTE. The journal includes feature articles concerning the teaching and learning of composition and literature, "instructional notes," reviews, and even some poetry.

***Teaching Ideas*. NCTE. 3 January 2000 <http://serv1.ncte.org/teach/>**. Although not limited to teaching writing, this site offers some great information and suggestion for writing teachers.

Tinberg, Howard. *Border Talk: Writing and Knowing in the Two-Year College*. (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997) An interesting ethnographic account of a diverse group of community college faculty discussing the issues surrounding the nature of good writing, writing instruction, writing centers, and the educational mission of the two-year college.

Writing Center. The Writing Center (most institutions have one) is a space in which writers invite writers to talk about writing. Writing Center consultants abandon the typical master/apprentice model in favor of a collaborative, dialogic approach, which creates a more open, honest, and rich teacher/student dynamic. As co-learners, we read and discuss writing at every stage of the process—planning, drafting, revising, and editing. And we engage in many levels of literacy learning beyond the written word. To articulate ways to write and revise effectively and appropriately, we together read the document, converse with one another about it, ask questions, and listen. And in this individualized setting, we often enjoy the opportunity to know and analyze the cultural context of the writing

and literacy background of the writer. Although writing itself is central, the interplay of each of these literate acts contributes greatly to the success of the writing center exchange. It is an invaluable resource for literacy learning for all involved.

POSTSECONDARY SCENARIOS

DRIVE WORDS POETRY

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I've used "Drive Words Poetry" in first-year writing classes that focus on the study and practice of writing. One of my goals in assigning this activity is to deepen students' awareness of reading as a process of active meaning-making. A second goal is to help students experience how a “controlling” or “organizing” idea might emerge from their thinking about an experience (of reading, in this case) and how that idea then "drives" a piece (the poem) that takes shape from that experience.

This poem-making activity builds on earlier class discussions/activities where we try to account for our responses to the texts we read. (One earlier activity, for example, is the widely known practice of "hotspotting”—marking passages that are striking or “hot” for us as we read and jotting a few notes to ourselves in the margins in which we speculate about why this part of the text seems striking to us). We begin this activity after we've finished a course text, usually a carefully crafted, book-length non-fiction argument such as T. Jordan’s *Riding the White Horse Home*, R. Rodriguez’s *Hunger of Memory*, or J. Alvarez’s *Something to Declare*. At this point, students have begun to form some lasting impressions of the book and have responded in various ways to portions of the book at earlier points in the semester.

First, I ask students to page through their text and circle those words or phrases that "drive" their reading of the text and to copy the words or phrases they have circled onto a piece of paper. I explain that the words or phrases could include a crucial moment or spoken line from a larger scene, a compelling description or a reflection on a larger abstractions such as “love,” “justice,” “truth,” “maturity." (I suggest that each person's list will reflect his/her own understanding of the book as well as his/her own response to it and larger interests.) I ask them to collect about 25 such words/phrases.

Then I ask students to play with the words and phrases they collected, arranging the material into a poem that represents their reading of the book. They can modify the words or phrases they have collected. They can opt to leave some of the phrases out of their poem or search the book for new phrases. They do need to keep track of the work they do moving from the list to the poem (and, perhaps, back to the book) for the final part of the activity.

For our next class meeting, students bring to class their finished poem and a "post" poem-writing reflection—a page or so of writing where they reflect on their experiences with making this poem. To help students get started with the reflection, I provide some questions like: 1)Describe the goal(s) you had for this poem: What elements of the book or your experience did you most want to capture in this poem? 2) Describe two of the most important decisions you made as you were forming this poem—decisions that seemed critical to creating the kind of effect/impact you wanted your poem to have. 3) What did you learn about your response to the book or yourself as a writer through this activity?

In-class, students share their poems (sometimes by loading them onto a course website; sometimes by having a class read-around) and we discuss the discoveries we made about the book, about ourselves as readers and writers/poets, and about how meaning-making happens through the processes of reading and writing.

Because some students are initially intimidated by the genre of poetry, there can be some anxiousness about the assignment and about sharing the poem. Across the board, however, I have found that students are eager to read and discuss their classmates' poems and are appreciative of their peers' work. Given my goals, the process of moving

between non-fiction prose and poetry, crafting our own poems and reflecting on that experience is more important than the quality of the poems/products students actually produce.

While this activity sponsors different kinds of conversations in different first-year writing classes, here are some of the most common topics that students raise:

- It builds on students' prior knowledge of thesis statements by disrupting that notion somewhat. Students understand that a vision/larger sense of what they are writing toward takes shape and begins to guide the decisions they make as they construct their poems. That vision is like a thesis statement but need not be boiled down in such a narrow way. One class latched onto the notion of an "organizing idea"—by which they meant that nexus of commitments a writer has that drives his/her composition of a piece—and I've offered that term to my students in subsequent years with much success. In this case, students have a particular experience or understanding of the book they want to convey, the requirement of the poetic form and source text, the understanding that this writing will eventually be shared with classmates who have also read the book. They may even have relationships they want to negotiate via their poem. (One student described herself as wanting to defend her earlier critique of the book; another wanted to maintain his reputation "as the one who always injects some humor," etc.). The term, "organizing idea," often becomes a part of the shared class vocabulary around writing, replacing "thesis statement" but building on that notion in productive ways.

- This activity regularly engages the class in a discussion of where meaning resides—and complicates less nuanced notions of readerly/writerly authority that would locate meaning solely in the writers' (or the readers') hands alone. As a reading response, this activity documents a kind of compositional process in reading (as well as writing).

- Students are understandably concerned about/want to know whether this writing is "their own" when the phrases have been lifted from another text. We can use this as an opportunity to talk about "found" poetry/images—poems/images constructed from pre-existing texts. I also see this as an opportunity to engage the class in thinking about/discussing what's at stake in plagiarism.

- Sometimes a number of students in a class will describe this activity as a really important moment for them in understanding what writers do. In that case, we will often talk more about that discovery as a means of growing understanding of the work writing does/can do in the world.

POSTSECONDARY SCENARIOS

LISTENING

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This activity was inspired by discussions in the PreK-16 Language Arts/English Task Force meetings regarding listening and the fact that it is all too often overlooked as a literate act. As parents and teachers, we just assume that our children and our students should know how to listen. For most, then, listening is considered a disciplinary rather than a pedagogical concern. Thus, it is no wonder that few know—really know—how to be good listeners. In an effort to more deliberately consider and use listening as an important literate act in my writing class, I generated this activity, which begins with a discussion of the various parts of literacy—reading, writing, speaking, and listening--and the ways that they connect and inform one another. Students typically find quick and obvious links between writing and reading. The more you read, they have always been told (and some have come to believe), the better you'll write. Many also see clear connections between writing and speaking as they compare the task of writing an essay to delivering a speech or note the value of verbally brainstorming for topics. Very few, however, feel immediately comfortable linking writing to listening. They might point out that listeners take copious lecture notes, but, for the most part, they have never really considered listening as a literate act. It is just something they feel they have always been told to do, but very few can recall learning how to listen. Moreover, very few can name more than one person who they consider "good listeners." Though some proudly claim that they are good listeners in spite of poor training, most admit that we feel ill-equipped as listeners.

So we leave this discussion with the two assignments of first watching and observing how well others listen to us and then turning the lens on ourselves to discern just what kinds of listeners we are. Inevitably, when we return to class the next time to discuss our findings, we boldly complain about how few people are actually listening to us and then move sheepishly to confessions of our poor, or in some cases nonexistent, listening skills. Finally, we turn the conversation back to writing and the ways that our abilities as writers might improve if we were better listeners and, therefore, more astute observers of the world around us. This kind of self-inventory of our own literate backgrounds and skills is an effective resource for all that it prompts us to teach ourselves about literacy learning.

POSTSECONDARY SCENARIOS

READING AND WRITING BACK TO MEDIA

Shari Stenberg, Contributor
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I've used this activity in a first-year writing class in which popular culture and media is a focus. My goal is to help students develop a critical lens through which to view media by examining the rhetorical choices made in these texts as well as the effects of these choices on readers. Additionally, I hope it will help them think about the choices available to them when they compose their own texts.

I first present students with several versions of media coverage on the same issue or event. In the past, I have used the Elian Gonzalez story, the September 11th anniversary, and most recently, coverage of a marketplace bombing in Baghdad—stories in which different groups clearly have a stake in how the story is told. It is interesting to draw from a range of media outlets: newspapers, websites, network and cable news. After examining these texts, I ask students to spend a few minutes writing about what most stood out to them, whether words, images, voices, etc. I then provide (or ask them to help me generate) a list of more specific prompts, which have included the following:

- Whose voice/perspective is given most space in each piece? The least? Who is mentioned but not quoted?
- How do the headlines and leads (the first paragraph) work to gain readers' interest?
- How much context or history about this issue/event is provided?
- How do the images work in relation to the text (written or spoken words)?
- Who is the audience for each piece? How do you know?
- What strategies are used to evoke particular emotions in each piece?

While we tend not to discuss each question explicitly, this activity often leads to a lively and impassioned discussion about rhetorical strategies used to tell a *particular version* of a story. For instance, as we looked at coverage from *The New York Times* and *The Irish Times* of the bombing of a civilian area in Baghdad, the students pointed to the use of passive voice in the *New York Times*. "[Civilians] were killed when a missile or bomb struck a crowded marketplace." Not until deep in the fourth paragraph is it mentioned that the incident is "attributed by the Iraqis to an American air attack." On the other hand, *The Irish Times blames* "Coalition bombs" in its first paragraph. Students also compared language choice (the event was described as a "massacre" in *The Irish Times*) and the accompanying images (the face of a devastated father seeing the dead body of his son in the Irish paper and an Iraqi family, holding hands in the *New York Times*).

In addition to discussing the rhetorical choices and their effects, this activity often leads to a broader discussion in which we challenge media objectivity. My students sometimes connect this to the expectation for objectivity in their academic writing, and we talk about how writing is always shaped by the writer's choices. This activity also raises issues of our "sound bite" culture and the ways media outlets compete for our attention by exploiting our fears or provoking anger. Finally, we talk about the stakes particular media outlets have in presenting a particular version of a story, and whose stories get lost as a result.

As a follow-up to this activity, I have asked students to choose a minimally represented figure in the story (or one affected by it but absent) and to write a (fictional) piece telling his/her version of it. This often leads to a compelling discussion of whose stories are told, and invites them to think from the perspective of another.

POSTSECONDARY SCENARIOS

"REAL-WORLD" SPEAKING/WRITING

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This activity can be done as a group, paired, or individual activity in a Speech or English class.

Students prepare for the activity by gathering examples of real-word writing – letters to the editor, brochures, instruction manuals, pamphlets, etc. They discuss and write about the features of the different genres. Then:

1. The class brainstorms orally and in writing to generate ideas for areas of need for "real" speaking and writing. For example:
    - A controversial but little understood local environmental issue
    - An unjust or unclear university/college guideline or procedure
    - An underutilized public service

2. Each individual, pair, or group decides on an audience/recipient for their project.

3. They decide and write a proposal regarding what form/genre the writing or speaking should take (examples: a letter to the editor, a speech at a public hearing, a brochure, etc.).

4. They work on the proposal, knowing they will be presenting the proposal orally, with each member contributing orally to the instructor and any other "real" kind of audience member. (Our building manager at the Sarpy campus of MCC was present for one of mine because all of the groups had worked on a Sarpy-based project.)

5. Proposals are given orally and suggestions and clarification questions are asked and responded to.

6. Writing projects are designed in consultation with peers, teacher, and real-world representatives.

7. Individuals or groups also write cover letters to accompany their writing project (a guide and sample are provided).

8. Students give a last oral report of refinements before sending out the project and cover letter.

9. When a response is received, students share this information orally with the class.

*One could also have students in groups analyze and write about the group dynamics as they occurred. (Did anyone emerge as leader? etc.) This information can then be delivered in both written and oral formats.

POSTSECONDARY SCENARIOS

SENSE ACTIVITY

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Objective: To have students realize through the use of the five senses (touching, tasting, smelling, seeing, hearing) the need for more intense observation of things around them in order to write with more specific and authentic detail.

This activity can go along with Chapter 3 "Observing" in *The Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers* text or it can stand alone.

Before beginning this activity, you may take each of the five senses and have the class brainstorm with you various descriptive words that fit under each sense – under touch, for instance, you might consider words such as smooth, rough, soft, sandpapery, etc. This may help students come up with more descriptive words when they are describing their object.

Steps:

1. Gather various (perhaps related) small objects (I have used items related to trees, for instance – bark, leaves, pieces of branch).

2. Place each item in a small, brown sack, and hand out to students.

3. Explain to students that even if they recognize what they have in their sack, they should try to describe it as if they did not recognize it.

4. Have students close their eyes, take the object out of sack, inspect it for touch and smell, listen to how it sounds, taste it (if appropriate!) and then place it back in sack before opening eyes.

5. Have students write what they observed through touch, smell, hearing, and perhaps taste, using as much description and detail as possible.

6. Discuss what they have written.

7. Next, have students take the object out of the sack and inspect it adding the sense of sight.

8. Have them add to their sight observations to the previous description writing.

9. Again, discuss what they have written.

10. Now it is time for them to take a leap in their thinking and writing. Have the students concentrate on their own individual object. Have them come up with a memory or idea or image that their object makes them think of and write about that for several minutes.

11. Discuss what they have "discovered" as they have written about their object.

12. Ask students to continue writing from this object or some other object that “jumps” out at them and turn it into a more formal piece of writing. This may be an essay, a story, a combination of both, etc.

13. These will be brought back to class typed, double spaced, etc. and workshopped.

Nebraska

Common Classroom Practices

COMMON CLASSROOM PRACTICES

Our aim in this section is to identify a range of classroom practices that our Task Force members share across the educational levels. This list is intended to be neither exhaustive nor prescriptive; rather, we articulate shared practices that are suggestive of the kinds of literacy classrooms we seek to create as professional sponsors of students' literacy development. While we are mindful that literacy learning must be developmentally appropriate, and that the practices below must be adapted for grade level and student ability, we also want to make clear that literacy learning is *recursive*; in other words, language learners of all ages and all abilities benefit from some of the same experiences and activities.

Because we offer this document as an invitation to conversation, and because we believe all decisions about *how* to teach are a local responsibility and prerogative, we preface our description of specific classroom practices with a series of questions. These questions emerge from the shared commitments we have unearthed across our grade levels and institution types. They are appropriate for *all* of us who support literacy learning, whether in classrooms, communities, or homes.

1. *How can we help learners attend to process?* How can we design environments (physical and curricular) to encourage learners' awareness of how they write, read, speak and listen?

2. *How can we support ALL learners*? How can we design environments that account for the wealth of individual learning styles and practices as well as a variety of teacher approaches, interests, and abilities? How can we help every learner feel successful?

3. *How can we encourage active learning*? How can we design environments in which learners are engaged and enthusiastic?

4. *How can we encourage connected learning*? How can we design environments in which learners connect their learning to their sense of self, place, community, and world?

5. *How can we encourage engagement with diversity and difference*? How can we design environments in which learners seek out, celebrate, and analyze perspectives emerging from various experiences and cultural backgrounds?

6. *How can we encourage cross-curricular learning?* How can we design environments in which learners integrate their learning across content areas while protecting and enhancing the integrity of each discipline?

7. *How can we encourage integration of the language arts*? How can we design environments in which learners view and experience writing, reading, speaking, and listening as mutually reinforcing while we protect and enhance the integrity of each set of literate practices?

8. *How can we help learners develop technological literacy*? How can we design environments in which learners become adept at using, and aware of the issues in using, various technologies?

9. *How can we help learners experience literacy learning as authentic?* How can we design environments in which learners are immersed in meaningful, real-world literacy practices? How can those of us charged with assessing student work design authentic assessments?

10. *How can we encourage developmentally appropriate learning?* How can we design environments that honor "where students are" in their intellectual, psychological, and emotional development while challenging them to push their development forward?

The classroom practices that follow are only the beginning of our collective answer to these questions. Together, they comprise a *portrait of possibilities*. Ultimately, however, the literacy development of each learner will be shaped by what her/his local literacy sponsors offer. We hope that our partial answer to these questions spurs others to pursue their own answers, as suits their unique circumstances and the needs of the learners with whom they work.

Finally, we wish to note that while each practice below has been used successfully by Task Force members in our classrooms, we recognize that no classroom practice, on its own, will "create learners." Learners – engaged meaning-makers – are created through the sustained and sustaining efforts of students, teachers, parents, peers, and community members working together to make literacy a meaningful and fulfilling part of the lives of Nebraska's young people.

Common Classroom Practices:

- *close reading*: detailed, focused attention to what a text says *and* how it works.
- *collaborative projects*: projects that entail the active, sustained participation of two or more students. (Note: not just group work.)
- *community- or place-based writing*: writing projects in which students write for, about, or with local communities (perhaps including classroom communities). May include family-based or service-learning projects.
- *conferences (individual and group)*: short (usually 10-15 minute) meetings in which student(s) and teacher discuss a developing literacy project.
- *cross-curricular projects*: students integrate knowledge and practices from more than one content area.
- *diverse readings*: introduction of literatures and other texts representing a wide range of races/ethnicities, sexual orientations, classes, and perspectives.
- *evidence-based interpretation*: arguments about textual meaning supported by passages from texts.
- *examination of cultural/historical context:* exploration of cultural and historical situation in which texts (including students' own) are written, published, circulated, and read.
- *flexible assignments*: prompts that allow students a range of choices for topic and research design.
- *freewriting*: a form of informal writing, made popular by writing teacher Peter Elbow, in which writers "turn off the internal editor" and write quickly, without revising or editing.
- *individualized projects*: projects in which students' individual decision-making is paramount, and which require independent learning.
- *inquiry projects:* projects which ask students to conduct primary and secondary research from questions they generate.
- *Internet research*: students use the World Wide Web to search for and evaluate information and perspectives.
- *invention exercises (prewriting):* short writing activities aimed at generating material for writing projects.
- *lifewriting*: projects – usually, but not always, personal essays – in which students make meaning from their own experience.
- *mix of individual, small group, and large group activities*: students interact in various ways with others in their class, taking on a range of writing, reading, speaking, and listening roles.

- *modeling*: teachers, peers, and "professional" writers and speakers serve as examples, mentors, and guides for students.

- *multimedia presentations/projects*: using multimedia technology to develop presentations and projects – delivering PowerPoint presentations, building websites, etc.

- *open, respectful discussion*: classroom forums in which students feel free to explore their ideas and express their opinions and perspectives.

- *oral presentations*: formal and informal presentations to the class.

- *peer response writing groups*: working in small groups (say, four students per group), students read and critique each others' writing. Writers usually read their work aloud, and discussion ensues. May also involve written peer critiques and peer evaluation.

- *portfolios*: a common tool for collecting student work. Usually compiled by the student, portfolios may include "artifacts" representing students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening (reading journals; writing projects; videotapes of presentations; audio tapes of oral reading; etc), reflective writing, and formal writing projects.

- *reading aloud*: vocalizing one's own or another's text.

- *reading strategies:* ways of reading literature and other texts, including comprehension strategies (outlining, glossing, etc.), but also critical and interpretative perspectives.

- *"real-world" projects*: literacy projects designed for purposes and audiences outside of class, usually in "everyday" genres (letters to the editor, brochures or newsletters, proposals, speeches etc.).

- *revising and editing tools:* short writing activities aimed at making major (revising) or minor (editing) changes to drafts.

- *self assessment:* students monitor, measure, and comment on their own learning, often in the form of reflective cover notes for projects, author's notes for drafts, individualized rubrics, or course learning letters in portfolios.

- *self-sponsored projects*: projects that emerge from and develop around the questions and interests of question of students.

- *student publications*: public collections of student writing, including class books/ anthologies and other displays.

- *teacher feedback*: timely and extensive written and/or oral response from teacher to student on a developing writing project.

- *vocal interpretations*: presenting an interpretation of a text through vocal rendering.

- *writing on computers/keyboarding*: composing on computers; becoming familiar with composing, revising, and editing tools afforded by word processing programs.